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Coal's share in power generation drops below 50%

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Neeraj Chopra wins gold in first competition on Indian soil in three years

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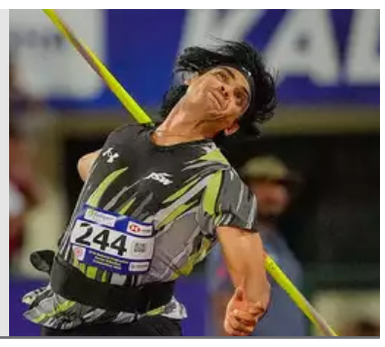

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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BENGALURU'S FORECAST

Yesterday
Min temp: 23°C
Max temp: 32°C

Today
Min temp: 23°C
Max temp: 33°C

SC FREES NEWSCLICK HEAD, CALLS ARREST 'INVALID'

SC slams cops for not giving remand copy to Purkayastha

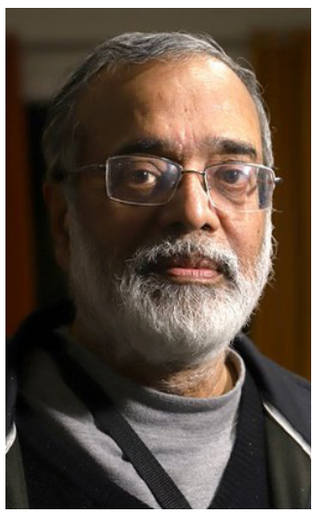
NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Supreme Court on Wednesday declared the arrest of NewsClick Founder Prabir Purkayastha as "invalid". The apex court ordered his release more than seven months after he was arrested under anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for allegedly spreading Chinese propaganda.

Purkayastha was arrested on 3 October last year by the Special Cell of Delhi Police.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Sandeep Mehta today said the remand copy was not provided in the case, which makes his arrest void.

Observing that the right to life and personal liberty was the "most sacrosanct" fundamental right guaranteed under Articles 20, 21 and 22, the apex court said any person arrested over allegations of commission of offences under UAPA or other offences has a fundamental and a statutory right to be informed about the grounds of arrest in writing.



Prabir Purkayastha **PHOTO: X@PYCPIM**

The top court delivered its verdict on Purkayastha's plea challenging the Delhi High Court's 13 October last year order dismissing his petition against arrest and subsequent police remand.

The bench said the right to be informed about the grounds of arrest flows from Article 22(1) of the Constitution and any infringement of this fundamental right would vitiate the process of arrest and remand.

"Mere fact that a chargesheet has been filed in the matter, would not validate the illegality and the unconstitutionality committed at the time of arresting the accused and the grant of initial police custody remand to the accused," it observed.

The bench said the remand application and the grounds of arrest were not supplied to him or his counsel before his custody application was decided by the trial court.

However, since a chargesheet has been filed in the case by Delhi police, the top court directed Prabir Purkayastha's release on bail on conditions to be fixed by the trial court

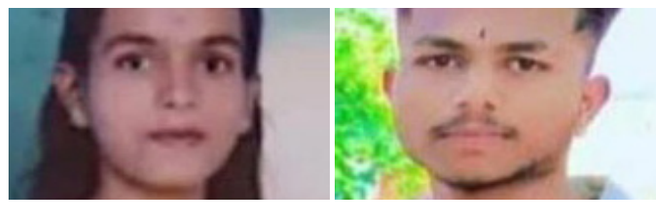
High court had on 13 October last year dismissed the pleas of Purkayastha and NewsClick's human resources department head Amit Chakravarty against their arrest and subsequent police remand.

Chakravarty had earlier withdrawn from the Supreme Court his petition against his arrest.

A Delhi court had in January allowed Chakravarty to turn an approver in the case lodged against the news portal under the UAPA over allegations that it received money to spread pro-China propaganda.

The judge had pardoned Chakravarty and claimed that he had material information which he was willing to disclose to the Delhi Police, which is investigating the matter. According to the FIR, the news portal allegedly received huge amount of funds from China to "disrupt the sovereignty of India" and cause disaffection against the country. —*PTI*

RELATIONSHIP GONE WRONG



Anjali Ambigera and Girish Sawant **PHOTO: SALAR**

After Neha, another woman in Hubballi stabbed to death

HUBBALLI, 15 MAY

Hardly a month after college student Neha Hiremath was stabbed to death by her former classmate, a 21-year-old woman was stabbed to death at her house by a jilted man in Hubballi on Wednesday.

Vishwa alias Girish Sawant, 23, knocked on the door of Anjali Ambigera's residence at Veerapur Oni in Bendigeri police station limits at 5.45am. When she opened the door, Girish stabbed Anjali to death with a knife in the presence of her grandmother and two sisters, a senior police officer said. Despite efforts by the family to stop the attacker, the man dragged her all over the house, kicking and stabbing her. Later, Girish pushed her into the kitchen where he stabbed her again.

A case of murder under Section 302 of Indian Penal Code has been registered against the accused and police have formed teams to nab him.

Girish had allegedly threatened Anjali that she would face a fate similar to Neha, according to her sister, who accused police of inaction when informed of the threat. "Girish was harassing my sister Anjali for some time now. He expressed his love to her but my sister declined. He even pressured my sister to go with him to Mysuru," Anjali's sister Yashodha said here.

Anjali's family and the residents staged a protest here demanding strict action against the accused. Later, police reached the spot and dispersed them, assuring them that justice would be delivered.

Anjali's father Mohan said around seven months ago she had told them that Girish was harassing her. "I had warned him (Girish). But today (Wednesday) morning, unfortunately, my daughter was murdered by this same person. The accused has to be punished," he said. No girl should be in the situation that Anjali has been in, her family said.

A preliminary investigation by the police revealed that the accused has a history of involvement in theft cases and was also known to be a bike thief. Meanwhile, Congress Councillor Niranjan Hiremath -- father of Neha -- met the deceased's family and slammed the State government over the "deteriorating" law and order situation in north Karnataka and also sought suspension of Police Commissioner of Hubballi-Dharwad Renuka Sukumar for alleged "failure." —*Salar News with Agencies*

Another J'khand min held for money laundering

RANCHI, 15 MAY

The Enforcement Directorate Wednesday arrested Congress leader and Jharkhand Rural Development Minister Alamgir Alam in a money laundering case, official sources said.

The 70-year-old was taken into custody at the agency's zonal office here under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) after about six hours of interrogation on the second day of questioning, the sources said.

He was grilled by the federal agency Tuesday for over nine hours and his statement was also recorded.

The agency had last week arrested Alam's personal secretary and state administrative service officer Sanjeev Kumar Lal,52, and the latter's domestic help Jahangir Alam,42, following the seizure of more than Rs 32 crore cash from a flat linked to them.

The money laundering investigation pertains to alleged irregularities and payment of "bribes" in the state rural development department.

Alamgir Alam **PHOTO: FB**

While seeking the remand of the two arrested people, the ED had informed a special PMLA court here that Lal collected "commission" on behalf of some influential people and that government officials from "top to bottom" in the rural department are involved in the alleged illegal cash payments nexus.

The total seizure of cash by the ED in this case has been recorded at around Rs 36.75 crore as the agency seized about Rs 3 crore from other locations including Rs 10.05 lakh from Lal's place and Rs 1.5 crore from a contractor's place. —*PTI*

Kerala boy infected with rare disease caused by amoeba

MALAPPURAM, 12 MAY

A case of a rare brain infection caused by a free-living amoeba living in contaminated waters was reported in northern Malappuram district of Kerala on Wednesday, where a five-year-old boy has been found infected. The boy, hailing from Moonniyur panchayat here, who is suffering from Amoebic Meningoencephalitis, has been admitted in Kozhikode Medical College and all possible medical care will be provided to him, Health Minister Veena George told reporters. The other family members of the boy are also under surveillance, she said, adding that there is no specific medicine for this rare infection. The minister said the boy and other family members had a bath in a nearby pond on 1 May, and the boy started developing fever, headache and vomiting on 10 May. —*PTI*

SC rejects plea for abortion of 27-week foetus

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to entertain a plea of a 20-year-old unmarried woman seeking termination of her over 27-week pregnancy, saying the foetus in the womb also has a fundamental right to live.A bench headed by Justice BR Gavai passed the order while hearing the woman's plea challenging the Delhi High Court's 3 May order refusing to allow termination. "Since the foetus is viable and normal, and there is no danger to the petitioner to carry on with the pregnancy, foeticide would neither be ethical nor legally permissible," it had said. Before the High Court, the petitioner had said that on 16 April, she felt discomfort in the abdomen and got an ultrasound scan done and it showed she was 27 weeks pregnant, which was beyond the legally permissible limit of 24 weeks. —*PTI*

Slovakia PM shot, in 'life-threatening condition'

PRAGUE, 15 MAY

Slovakia's populist Prime Minister Robert Fico is in life-threatening condition after being wounded in a shooting after a political event Wednesday afternoon, according to his Facebook profile.

Reports on TA3, a Slovakian TV station, said that Fico, 59, was hit in the stomach after four shots were fired outside the House of Culture in the town of Handlova, some 150 km northeast of the capital, where the leader was meeting with supporters. A suspect has been detained, it said.

A message posted to Fico's Facebook account said that the leader "has been shot multiple times and is currently in life-threatening condition. At this moment he is transported by helicopter to Banská Bystrica, because it would take too long to get to Bratislava due to the necessity of an acute procedure. The next few hours will decide."

Robert Fico **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

Deputy speaker of parliament Lubos Blaha confirmed the incident during a session of Slovakia's Parliament and adjourned it until further notice, the Slovak TASR news agency said. —*PTI*

CAA gets rolling, 14 people get citizenships

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

The first set of citizenship certificates under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act was issued Wednesday to 14 people, nearly two months after rules under the contentious law were notified to grant Indian nationality to persecuted non-Muslim migrants from three neighbouring countries.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed it a "historic day", saying the decades-long wait of those who faced religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan is over.

Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla handed over the certificates to the 14 people after their applications were processed online through a designated portal, an official spokesperson said.

This comes in the midst of the general elections which started on 19 April. The last phase of polling will be held on 1 June while the counting will take place on 4 June .

Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla hands over the first set of citizenship certificates **PHOTO: PTI**

While granting the citizenship certificates, the home secretary congratulated the 14 applicants and highlighted the salient features of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024.

Secretary Posts, Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Registrar General of India and senior officers were also present during the interactive session when the certificates were issued.

Home Minister Shah said the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian brothers and sisters who fled religious persecution in the three countries have started getting Indian citizenship and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fulfilled the promise made at the time of the country's independence.

"I express my gratitude to Modiji for giving justice and rights to these people who suffered for decades. I also assure all my refugee brothers and sisters that the Modi government will give citizenship to all of them through the CAA," he said on X in Hindi. —*PTI*

LIVES DESTROYED

S Asia's 97% displacements were in Manipur

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Conflict and violence triggered 69,000 displacements in South Asia in 2023, with Manipur violence alone accounting for 67,000, according to a new report.

The report by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) termed it the highest number of displacements triggered by conflict and violence in India since 2018.

On 3 May, 2023, a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in Manipur's hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The march led to ethnic clashes between the Meitei and the Kuki communities, ultimately claiming more than 200 lives.

Women hold a candlelight vigil to remember those who lost their lives in the Manipur violence, in Imphal **PHOTO: ANI**

The Manipur High Court had in March last year called for recommendations to be sent to the central government to recognise the Meitei community as a "scheduled tribe," an official status designed to protect minorities from marginalisation.

The call was met with resistance from other local scheduled tribes, including the Kukis.

Land disputes were also an underlying driver of the tensions.

More than three-quarters of the movements took place within Manipur, but almost a fifth were to the neighbouring state of Mizoram and smaller numbers to Nagaland and Assam.As the violence escalated, the central government imposed curfews, shut down the internet, and dispatched security forces.

It also set up relief camps and established a peace committee for Manipur, chaired by the state governor, but the initiative was hampered by disagreements about its composition. —*PTI*

SC slams 'lackadaisical' U'khand over forest fire

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Slamming Uttarakhand government for its "lackadaisical" approach in controlling forest fires, Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the state's chief secretary to personally present himself before it on 17 May to give explanation, including on utilisation of funds and vacancies in forest department.

Terming it a "very sorry state of affairs", the apex court said the state was just trying to find some excuse or the other.

A bench headed by Justice BR Gavai directed that the staff and vehicles of the forest departments of states shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like the 'Char Dham Yatra'.

The bench said it saw no reason as to why only Rs 3.41 crore out of the Rs 9.12 crore was utilised for forest related activity in Uttarakhand in 2023-24. It said taking into consideration the importance of controlling forest fires in Uttarakhand, the apex court had requested Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati to take instructions to disburse funds. —*PTI*

Sex scandal: Writers and academics write to CM

They highlighted threat to victims and sought action

BENGALURU, 15 MAY

A group of litterateurs and academics of State have written to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah demanding the immediate arrest of Hassan JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna.

Prajwal is facing charges of sexually abusing several women but has gone abroad, "absconding" from the law.

The State has constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by Additional Director General of Police BK Singh to probe the case, and the Interpol has issued a Blue Corner Notice against the Hassan MP, who reportedly left the country on 27 April.

Prajwal is the son of MLA and former minister HD Revanna, who too has been accused in a case of molestation and another case of abduction, and grandson of JD(S) patriarch and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda.

Condemning the alleged sexual abuse of women by Prajwal, as many as 107 intellectuals comprising litterateurs, academics, playwrights, singers and social activists have written to Siddaramaiah demanding his immediate arrest.

In their letter, they said the incident shows the feudal mindset of a powerful family, whose members hold key positions in Parliament, the legislative assembly, the legislative council, panchayats and municipal bodies.

They said it is a big crime that the victims of sexual exploitation were allegedly threatened and kidnapped in order to "cover up a crime, which has been happening for many years."

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah inaugurates Rajiv Gandhi Jyothi in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

The group highlighted the threat to the lives of the victims and the trauma their families are going through after the scandal broke out.

They said that some women after suffering ignominy attempted suicide while many stigmatised families migrated from Hassan.

The group said a fearless atmosphere should be created for victims to come forward and lodge complaints. They also sought a brake on trading of charges by political parties, and the completion of the SIT probe within a time-frame.

Reacting to the letter, Home Minister G Parameshwara said the government would take it seriously. *—PTI*

AFTER WIPRO

Infosys orders 4L litres treated waste water from BWSSB

BENGALURU, 15 MAY

After Wipro, now Infosys has also taken a plunge into greywater. The tech giant will soon be supplied with 4 lakh litres of zero-bacteria water, according to sources in the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB).

Starting this month, Wipro is being supplied with 3 lakh litres of treated water every day via tankers.

"We already have Arvind Mills committing to two lakh litres a day and Channabasappa Construction one lakh litres. I just had a meeting with Ecospace Tech Park and IMZ Ecoworld, they too have expressed interest. The movement is slowly picking pace," said BWSSB chairman V Ram Prasath Manohar to PTI. Promoting reuse of greywater is important, said Manohar, as water demand in Bengaluru is projected to cross 5,340 million litres per day (MLD) by 2030. Right now, the demand exceeds 2,100 MLD of which BWSSB supplies 1,470 MLD from the Cauvery River and the rest is met through borewells and water tank deliveries. BWSSB is reusing only about 10 MLD while it produces 1,200 MLD.

Infosys prize only for researchers aged up to 40 years

The Infosys Science Foundation (ISF) on Wednesday announced that it is steering its 'Infosys Prize' into a new direction by transitioning from a mid-career prize to an early-career one, revising the upper age limit for the winners to 40 from 50.

It said, winners who are not based in India will be requested to spend 30 days at a host institute in India, to build networks and spark conversations with research groups here. The categories that the Infosys Prize recognises would broadly stay the same, the ISF said. Economics, however, will now be a separate category. Previously, it was awarded under the Social Sciences category.

From 2024, the six categories that the Infosys Prize will be awarded in are: Economics, Engineering & Computer Science, Humanities & Social Sciences, Life Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, and Physical Sciences.

NR Narayana Murthy with Infosys Science Foundation President Kris Gopalakrishnan during the press meet, in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

IT veterans bat for increased funding for research

Narayan Murthy and Gopalakrishnan batted for increasing funding for research and higher academic institutes by both the private and public sector. They stressed on the need for changing certain archaic things by bringing in innovative ideas in this regard.

Speaking to reporters here, Gopalakrishnan said, "Look at US universities -- MIT, Harvard, Stanford, etc -- they get endowments worth billions of dollars. I hope that our alumni will contribute more to our institutions." "Today our institutions are primarily dependent on government funding....I want to see more industry participation," he said. *—PTI*

Nanjundeshwara Temple gets record Rs 1.72 cr donations

MYSURU, 15 MAY

W Nanjundeshwara Temple in Nanjangud witnessed a record Rs 1.72 crore donation in a month.The amassed donation amounted to Rs 1,72,85,296 in cash, accompanied by 92gof gold, 3kg silver, and an assortment of 33 foreign currencies. The influx of donation is due to a large number of devotees visiting the temple, especially on full moon days. The task of counting and cataloguing the offerings was conducted by the temple's Executive Officer, Jagadish Kumar, Assistant Executive Officers Satish and Venkatesh Prasad.

—Salar News

2 arrested for killing woman over arecanut tree

DAVANGERE, 15 MAY

Basavapatna Police arrested two men for murder after a woman's decomposed body was found near Bhadra Canal in Channagiri taluk of Davangere. The victim, 47, was from Arakere in Bhadravati taluk of Shivamogga district. The accused are Kumar HG, 50, and Chidanandappa, 54, residents of Bhadravati. Niraganti Annappa, 53, spotted the body and reported it to the police. The police found ligature mark, which pointed to strangulation on the victim's neck. Reportedly, Kumar and Chidanandappa killed the victim enraged over the alleged felling of arecanut trees on their farm by the deceased. A missing person's report filed at the Holehonnur police station in Bhadravati helped identify the victim and trace her relatives.

—Salar News

SPICK AND SPAN

Civic workers spruce up the garden on the premises of Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

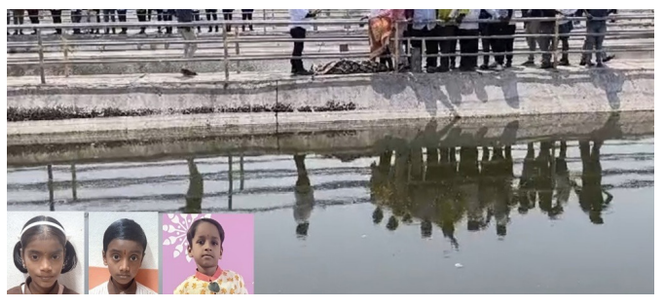
Child rights body files case after kids found dead in sewage plant

VIJAYAPURA, 15 MAY

Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) has registered a suo moto case following the death of three children in the Vijayapura sewage water processing unit.

Adressing reporters on Wednesday, KSCPCR member Shashidhar Kosambe said that the commission has registered a case against Vijayapura City Municipal.

Anushka Anil Dahinde, 9, and Vijay Anil Dahinde, 7, both from Gadag and Mihir Srikant Janagouli, 7, were found dead at the sewage water plant on Monday. Anushka and Vijay had come to their maternal uncle's home in Vijayapura.



The commission has registered a case against Vijayapura City Municipal **PHOTO: SALAR**

Parents had alleged that the negligence of municipal staff.

Kosambe further stated that Vijayapura District Child Protection Officers have been tasked with gathering information and compiling a detailed report to ascertain the circumstances leading to death.

Once the report is submitted, Kosambe said the commission will seek the the government's suggestion and proceed with the action.

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

DAKSHINA KANNADA GEARS UP FOR MONSOON SEASON

MANGALURU, 15 MAY

Dakshina Kannada district administration has got down to work ahead of the monsoon season (June to August) by beginning preparations to tackle various rain-related issues.

At a meeting held on Tuesday, the district authorities, Deputy Commissioner Mullai Muhilan MP reached out to the ground-level bureaucracy with directions on how to handle the challenges during the monsoon.

Addressing the drinking water and disaster management authority officials, he highlighted the problems faced due to poor maintenance of the electrical system under Mangaluru Electric Supply Company (MESCOM) and said it was not just failure of power supply during rains but also snapping of live cables and falling electric poles, which were a concern. Since this would cause serious damage to life and property, he urged MESCOM to take precautions by carrying out inspections. Muhilan also directed MESCOM to deploy additional men and open more control rooms and said both urban and rural areas must be given equal importance. Muhilan said in the run-up to the monsoons, the existing domestic water availability should be managed prudently. At the meeting, emphasis was laid on cleaning of dumping yards and garbage disposal areas before the monsoon. *—PTI*

Don't panic, says BBMP after dengue cases rise in City

BENGALURU, 15 MAY

With Karnataka reporting an increasing number of confirmed cases of dengue, the State Health Department on Wednesday said preventive measures have been taken to control the disease from spreading further.

As of 13 May, the State has reported 2,877 confirmed cases of dengue since 1 January this year, a notable increase compared to last year's figure of 1,725 during the same period. This rise is attributed to heightened screening, reporting, and testing efforts, they said.

Lalitha Bhatati, a Senior Health Officer at BBMP, attributed the rise to recent temperature fluctuations, but emphasised there's no need to panic. BBMP is taking proactive measures to tackle the situation by sending in teams to eliminate mosquito breeding sites, as the monsoon season brings increased risk.

Daily house-to-house visits by health staff and ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers are also being carried out to promote "Health Education and Behaviour Change Communication."

In water-scarce areas, awareness is created to ensure that the water collection containers are properly covered. A meeting will be held with the heads of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), owners of construction areas, and owners of commercial complexes to raise awareness and persuade them about their role in dengue control, the officials said.Speaking to **Salar News**, Asima Banu, Principal of Bengaluru Medical College, Kalasipalya and a Chief Virologist, said "The symptoms of dengue are high fever for more than 7 weeks, dehydration and myalgia as well. The children and elders have to be more cautious at these times.

The worst case scenario is that the person can go into Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever or Hemorrhagic Shock Syndrome, where the blood vessels get damaged due to the virus."Areas with poor hygiene and waste management, like East, South, and Mahadevapura zones, have been identified as having higher caseloads. Specific neighbourhoods like Tilak Nagar, Thyagarajanagar, Manorayanapalya, JC Nagar, Domlur, and Jogupalya are also showing a rise in cases.

—Salar News/PTI

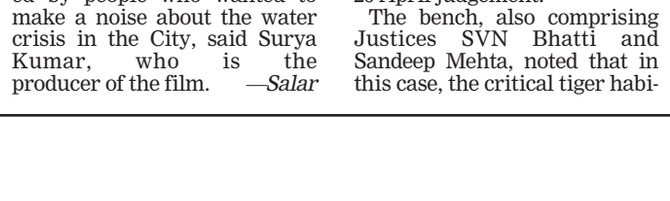
MLC election unveils rift between BJP and JD(S)

MYSURU, 15 MAY

Despite BJP finalising the ticket for EC Ningaraje Gowda for South Teachers Constituency, JD(S) has thrown its hat into the ring by announcing its candidate. As both the parties declared their candidates, the Karnataka MLC election has garnered significant attention. Vivekananda has emerged as the chosen candidate for JD(S). Former MLA Mahesh hinted that BJP high command had indicated their willingness to cede this constituency to JD(S). However, he also announced that BJP would finalise its candidate on 15 May, coinciding with the issuance of the B form to their nominee.

This development has sparked speculation regarding BJP's next move. The potential scenario might favour Congress in this fray. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the impact of this rift on BJP-JD(S) alliance in the State.

—Salar News



Both JD(S) and BJP declared their candidates **PHOTO: PTI**

WATER CRISIS

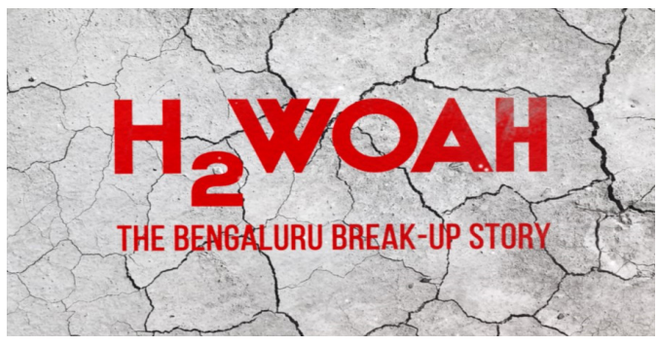
Cauvery breaks up with B'luru: A film with a message

BENGALURU, 15 MAY

Summer showers have brought down temperatures in Bengaluru, but the shortage of water persists in parts of the Garden City of India. The water supply from Cauvery River has been dwindling over the years. On Tuesday, a short film titled "H2Woah: The Bengaluru Break-up Story" released on YouTube portrayed the relationship between Kaveri and Bengaluru amid the water crisis.

The 16-minute short film, directed by Johnny Ambrose, starts with peak water crisis that happened in March 2024. The anecdote at the start is about a youth stuck at a washroom in a mall due to the lack of water. A hilarious beginning to the film, but a startling truth.

Having a crew of 25 onscreen and offscreen, the film then gives accounts of people from various walks of life about Bengaluru and Water/Cauvery. The main protagonists of the film, Bengaluru and Cauvery, come after that.



The 16-minute short film, directed by Johnny Ambrose, starts with peak water crisis that happened in March 2024 **PHOTO: SALAR**

Actors donning the roles of Bengaluru, Cauvery and Weather share their stories about the water crisis and their relationship with each other. The film, shot using Sony A753 camera, ends on with the message saying Cauvery would break up with Bengaluru by July 2030 and it is time to act to prevent the disaster.

The film, "driven by a team of Bengaluru natives, was sparked by the severe water crises many of us experienced first-hand in March 2024.

Witnessing our community's struggle, we were inspired to shift from water conservation to urgent adaptation strategies through the powerful medium of film. "H2Whoa" aims to plant a seed of awareness and action among Bangaloreans, emphasising that the time for change is now," said Ambrose, who have a couple of short films, brand and music videos to his credit. Sushant Sadamate, executive producer of the film, said they have collaborated with diverse local talents, including actors who are passionate advocates for the City's sustainability. "The actors in the film are native Bengalureans who have seen the City in its past glory and witnessed this acute drinking water shortage for the first time in decades and people from outside the City who have made Bengaluru their home. Most of them have faced the camera for the first time," Ambrose said.

"Our team of over 25 volunteers has worked tirelessly, offering their services pro bono," Sadamate said. The only cost to make the film was involved in hiring the equipment and renting the studio in the City for shooting the visuals. That expenditure was funded by people who wanted to make a noise about the water crisis in the City, said Surya Kumar, who is the producer of the film. *—Salar*

SC stops mining activity within 1 km of tiger reserves

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Supreme Court said on Wednesday that continuance of mining activities within a radius of one km from the boundaries of critical tiger reserves would be in contempt of its April last year order.

The apex court had in its 26 April, 2023 verdict directed that mining within a national park and wildlife sanctuary and within an area of one km from their boundary shall not be permissible.

A bench headed by Justice BR Gavai was hearing an application seeking a direction to the Rajasthan government to stop all mining activities which were in alleged violation of the 26 April judgement.

The bench, also comprising Justices SVN Bhatti and Sandeep Mehta, noted that in this case, the critical tiger habitat was the buffer zone created in order to protect the Sariska Wildlife Sanctuary.

- The court directed that mining within a national park and within an area of one km from their boundary shall not be permissible

The bench said in view of these observations, it desn't find that any specific direction was required to the state of Rajasthan to prohibit mining activities within a radius of one km from the boundaries of the critical tiger habitat (tiger reserves). It posted the matter in July for reporting compliance. The bench noted the applicant had claimed that mining activities were continuing within a radius of one km of the Sariska tiger habitat which is a protected area. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sisodia's judicial custody extended till 30 May

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

A Delhi court on Wednesday extended the judicial custody of AAP leader and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia till 30 May in a corruption case related to an alleged excise scam. Special judge for CBI and ED Kaveri Baweja also fixed 30 May for further arguments on framing of charges in the case. The judge noted that an application for postponement of arguments on the charge is pending before the high court. Sisodia and other accused persons in custody were produced before the court through video-conferencing from prison. The court had on 30 April dismissed the bail pleas of Sisodia in corruption and money laundering cases, lodged by CBI and ED in relation to the alleged scam. The court had reserved the order after hearing arguments from CBI and ED as well as the counsel appearing for Sisodia. *—PTI*

Ex-guv of Gujarat Kamla Beniwal dies at 97

JAIPUR, 15 MAY

Veteran Congress leader and former governor of Gujarat Kamla Beniwal died at a private hospital in Jaipur on Wednesday. She was 97.Beniwal was admitted to the hospital after a brief illness. One of her family members said the funeral will be held on Thursday. Apart from Gujarat, Beniwal also served as governor of Tripura and Mizoram.She was also the deputy chief minister of Rajasthan, apart from holding other posts in the state government and the Congress party. *—PTI*

Veteran Cong leader Dambarudhar Ulaka dies at 86

BHUBANESWAR, 15 MAY

Veteran Congress leader and former Odisha minister Dambarudhar Ulaka died of old age-related ailments, family sources said on Wednesday. He was 86. Ulaka breathed his last while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Bhubaneswar on Tuesday night. Family sources said Ulaka's funeral will be held at his birthplace Bankili in Rayagada district. He was elected to Odisha Assembly 5 times on Congress ticket from Bissam-Cuttack seat in Rayagada district. He represented the seat in 1974, 1977, 1995, 2004 and 2009. The veteran leader's son Nilamadhab Ulaka is contesting the elections from the Bissam-Cuttack assembly segment as an independent after being denied ticket by Congress. *—PTI*

Bhojpuri star's mother contests from Karakat

PATNA, 15 MAY

Pratima Devi, the mother of Bhojpuri superstar Pawan Singh, filed nomination for the Karakat Lok Sabha seat, which her son is contesting as an Independent. Neither Singh nor his mother made any statement about the move. Former Union minister Upendra Kushwaha, who heads Rashtriya Lok Morcha, is NDA candidate in Karakat. RJD-led Mahagathbandhan has fielded CPI (M-L) Liberation's Rajaram Singh in the seat, which will go to the polls on 1 June. Speculations are rife that Pratima Devi, who filed the nomination on Tuesday as an Independent, entered the fray as her son, a BJP member, might withdraw from the contest. Singh, who turned down a BJP ticket from Asansol in West Bengal, has been advised by senior party leaders not to contest against the NDA nominee, sources said. He is understood to have lobbied with opposition parties like the RJD for a Lok Sabha ticket from Bihar before deciding to fight as an Independent candidate. *—PTI*

Kharge: Will give poor 10kg free ration

Kharge ensures of doubling free ration

LUCKNOW, 15 MAY

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav at a press conference in Lucknow, Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge announced Wednesday that if INDIA bloc is voted to power, it will double the quantity of free rations provided by BJP to the poor.

He referred to the Modi government scheme providing five kilograms of ration to the poor every month and said, "The Congress brought the Food Security Act, you did nothing." "You are giving five kg, if INDIA is formed, we will give 10 kg of ration to the poor," Kharge said, addressing a joint press conference here with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav.

"I am saying this with guarantee because we have already done it in states, including Telangana and Karnataka," he added. In a campaign speech recently, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had pitched for more employment opportunities for youngsters, saying the Modi government's scheme to provide free ration to the poor every month was not a solution.

BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, list the government's free ration scheme in every political rally. The party has even mentioned in its manifesto that it will continue the scheme till 2029 after coming to power.

Yadav has also promised in several of his rallies that the quality of ration distributed to the poor will be improved if the INDIA bloc comes to power.

Addressing an election rally in Odisha's Bolangir Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday alleged that BJP wants to "destroy" the Constitution and scrap the reservation provided to tribals, Dalits, and backward class. *—PTI*

PoK is part of India, we will take it: Shah

Shah hits out at INDIA bloc over PoK row

SERAMPORE, 15 MAY

Union Minister and BJP senior leader Amit Shah addresses a campaign rally for Lok Sabha polls in Hooghly on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday referred to protests in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and said "PoK is part of India and we will take it".

Addressing a rally in Serampore, Shah said while peace has returned to once trouble-torn Kashmir after abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir "now echoes with slogans of Azadi and protests.

"After the abrogation of Article 370 by the government in 2019 peace has returned to Kashmir. But now we witness protests in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Earlier slogans of Azadi were heard here, now the same slogans are heard in PoK. Earlier stones were pelted here, now stones are pelted in PoK," he said.

Hitting out at Congress leaders for not supporting the demand of taking over PoK, Shah said, "Congress leaders like Mani Shankar Aiyar say it should not be done as they have an atom bomb. But let me say this Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is part of India and we will take it."

Shah said the present Lok Sabha elections are about "choosing between corrupt leaders of INDI alliance and honest politician Narendra Modi, who despite being Chief Minister and then Prime Minister never had an allegation of single paisa against him."

"It's a fight between the 'Chinese guarantee' of the INDIA and the concrete promises of Modi Ji. It's a fight between infiltration and the guarantee of citizenship under CAA. It's a fight between 'Vote for Vikas' and 'Vote for Jihad'! The choice is yours," he said. *—PTI*

Poll violence: EC summons Andhra chief secy, DGP

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Taking cognisance of post-poll violence in Andhra Pradesh, the Election Commission of India has summoned the state's chief secretary and the DGP on Thursday to "personally explain" the administration's failure to contain the incidents, sources said.

Reminding the state government that the Model Code of Conduct is still in force, the EC also asked the chief secretary and the police chief to ensure such incidents are not repeated.

The Commission has repeatedly emphasised that there is no place for violence in a democracy and since the announcement of Lok Sabha elections, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has been personally monitoring the election space to ensure peaceful and violence-free conduct of polls, officials pointed out.

When they appear at the Election Commission headquarters here on Thursday, the top Andhra Pradesh officials will be asked to "personally explain" the reasons for the administration's failure to contain the post-poll violence, the sources said.

They will also be asked about primitive steps being taken to avoid any such incidents in the future, the sources said.

Post-poll violence was reported in parts of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday where Lok Sabha and assembly polls were held together on Monday.

The leaders of the ruling YSRCP and Opposition TDP have levelled allegations against each other f or the incidents. *—PTI*

POLITICAL CURRY

BK Sharma, a 63-year-old owner of a roadside dhaba and Independent candidate from Amritsar constituency for the Lok Sabha elections, prepares food, in Amritsar on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Nadda: TMC stops central schemes

JP Nadda **PHOTO: FB**

Puralia, 15 May

BJP president JP Nadda while highlighting the schemes of the party, accused Trinamool Congress of trying to stop the benefits of central schemes from coming to Bengal. Nadda highlighted the challenges faced in delivering benefits under Garib Kalyan Yojana due to alleged interference by TMC members."Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave 5 lakh health cover to the unprivileged but Mamata Banerjee says "Ayushman Bharat Hobe Na", 1.25 crore lakh people could not avail Ayushman Bharat scheme because of Mamata Banerjee. Will you let such a government sustain?" Nadda said. Nadda emphasised the significance of the Ayushman Bharat Yojana, which provides a health cover of Rs 5 lakh to citizens above 70 years of age, irrespective of their economic status. He cited it as a hindrance to healthcare access for the underprivileged. Nadda reiterated that in three years India will become the third-largest economy in the world if BJP retains power. *—PTI*

SC allows Abbas Ansari to attend prayer meet for father

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed jailed MLA Abbas Ansari to attend a private prayer service in remembrance of his late father Mukhtar Ansari on June 10 at him house in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan also permitted Abbas Ansari to spend time with his family on 11 June and 12 June in police custody and directed the state police to make arrangements in this regard.

The top court ordered that Ansari be shifted to Ghazipur jail before 9 June and allowed be allowed to take part in the prayer service without any hindrance.

Additional Advocate General (AAG) for Uttar Pradesh Garima Prashad submitted there is no ritual left and all ceremonies relating to the death of his father are over as per his own admission.

The apex court directed that Ansari be sent back to Kasganj jail on 13 June.

Gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari died of a cardiac arrest at a hospital in Banda in Uttar Pradesh on 28 March. *—PTI*

HC lists Kejriwal's plea against ED summons for 11 July

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Delhi High Court listed Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's petition challenging the summonses issued to him by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for hearing on 11 July, on Wednesday.

A bench headed by Justice Suresh Kumar Kait granted four more weeks to AAP leader, who was given interim bail till 1 June by Supreme Court for campaigning in the Lok Sabha Elections, to file a rejoinder to the reply submitted by ED.

The counsel for the ED has earlier said the petition against the summonses was infructuous after Kejriwal's arrest by the agency on 21 March in the money laundering case following the high court's refusal to grant him interim protection from coercive action.

On Wednesday, the agency's lawyer said the petitioner must choose the forum before which he would press his issues.

The court also observed that a single judge of the high court, while rejecting the AAP leader's petition against his arrest, has already dealt with his grievances and an appeal against the decision was pending in the top court.

Senior advocate Vikram Chaudhary, appearing for Kejriwal, however, said the issues raised in the petition with respect to the "reading down" of the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) have not been decided by the single judge and urged the court to grant more time to file the rejoinder.

Stating the petitioner is a "vocal critic" of the ruling party and a partner of the Opposition INDIA bloc, the plea claimed that ED, being under control of the Union government, has been "weaponised". *—PTI*

Scindia's mother Madhavi Raje dies

GWALIOR, 15 MAY

Madhavi Raje Scindia,70, from the erstwhile royal family of Gwalior in MP, died in the morning at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, a source said.

She had been on ventilator in her last few days, the source said, adding she was undergoing treatment at the hospital for last three months and suffered from pneumonia along with sepsis.

Madhavi Raje Scindia **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

People from the Gwalior-Chambal region mourned her demise and many took to social media to express grief.

Madhavi Raje Scindia, who hailed from Nepal's royal family, got married to former Union minister Madhavrao Scindia in 1966.

She is survived by her son Jyotiraditya Scindia and daughter Chitrangada Raje Singh.Her mortal remains will be brought to Gwalior on Thursday morning and will be kept at the Rani Mahal in the Jai Vilas Palace for people to pay their respects. *—PTI*

COMMUNAL POLITICS?

BJP, Cong spar over 'Hindu-Muslim' politics

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Kalyan, Maharashtra, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP leaders on Wednesday cited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks that he will never do "Hindu-Muslim" politics to assert that he has worked for development of all sections of society without any discrimination.

With Congress and its allies accusing Modi of communal politics in his campaign, the prime minister had told News 18 on Tuesday that he won't be fit for public life if he starts doing Hindu-Muslim.

Congress, however, alleged that the "outgoing PM" has had no agenda barring Hindu-Muslim politics as 'Modi ki Guarantee' has "fallen flat" and '400 paar' given a "silent burial".

Former Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said Modi ended communal appeasement with his inclusive governance. Even Modi's critics cannot deny that his schemes have benefitted everyone, the BJP leader said. BJP spokesperson RP Singh claimed it was leaders of Congress and its allies which have spoken in favour of reservation for Muslims and strengthening personal laws, inviting a rejoinder from the Prime Minister.

Congress manifesto, he said, promises strengthening personal laws, alleging that it implies implementation of parts of sharia. RJD President Lalu Prasad Yadav has favoured reservation for Muslims, he added.

"The BJP's agenda is for the country's advancement," Singh said, noting that the his party's manifesto for expanding health insurance, housing, facilities and boosting infrastructure is meant for all sections of society." *—PTI*

Greenhorn Piyush sure of win, banks on Modi's work

MUMBAI, 15MAY

Union minister Piyush Goyal, contesting a Lok Sabha election for the first time, asserted on Wednesday that he will surely win -- but almost entirely because of the work done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, adding that this election will determine the fate of India.

"I recognise that we are all subsumed under Modi's performance... It is gradually dawning on people that this is Modi's election," Goyal told PTI during a road show - a slow crawling journey atop a decked up pickup truck that wound its way through a ward of Borivali in the Mumbai North constituency.Goyal, a Rajya Sabha member and a veteran manager of many an election campaign, including that of Lal Krishna Advani in 1989, replaced incumbent Gopal Shetty as BJP's candidate for the constituency. The elections are due on 20 May.

With four days left for campaigning, Goyal is crisscrossing all the assembly Drums are beaten amid slogans of "abki baar 400 paar", the call given by Modi himself to assert that the BJP-led NDA coalition will win more than 400 seats, even though the opposition has repeatedly said it is an impossible target.

But nobody is in doubt that the elections are being contested in the name of Modi, and the local candidate's work and reputation are incidental. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Six charred to death in Andhra road accident

AMARAVATI, 15 MAY

Six people were charred to death when a private bus hit a dumper truck near Chilakaluripeta in Palnadu district, resulting in a fire, a police official said on Wednesday. The accident occurred around 1am on Wednesday when the bus veered towards the truck to its extreme right and hit it at Pasumarru, police said. Among the dead were an eight-year-old girl, her grandmother and grandfather and another passenger while 20 injured passengers were admitted to a hospital. "We got the information through some people about the incident. We alerted ambulances and fire tenders. When we reached the spot, the bus was engulfed in flames," a police official told TV channels. According to police, the passengers belonged to Chinnaganjam area and were returning to Hyderabad after casting their votes in the elections in the state. —*PTI*

7 schools in Kanpur receive 'hoax' bomb threat

KANPUR, 15 MAY

As many as seven schools including two run by the government, received bomb threat emails which were found to be a 'hoax', officials said on Wednesday. "Most schools reported the threat emails to police on Tuesday after it came to their knowledge, as the schools were closed on Sunday and Monday," Additional Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Harish Chandra said. Five private schools and two government schools have received bomb threats through an email in the last 72 hours, he said. The schools that received the bomb threat include Gulmohar Vihar Public School in Hanumant Vihar, KDMA school in Gujaini, Sanatan Dharm Education Centre in Kaushalpuri, the Chintal's school in Singhpur Kachar, Virendra Swaroop School in Civil Lines Kendriya Vidyalaya Cantt and Kendriya Vidyalaya in Armapore estate. —*PTI*

IMD issues heatwave alert for Mumbai and Thane

MUMBAI, 15 MAY

Amid the sweltering conditions, the India Meteorological (IMD) has issued a heatwave alert for Mumbai and Thane for Wednesday along with the possibility of a thunderstorm. IMD scientist Sushma Nair said Thane and Vikhroli (in Mumbai) recorded temperatures of 39 degrees Celsius and above on Tuesday. There is also a possibility of a thunderstorm on Wednesday afternoon, Nair said. The heatwave will continue in Thane till Thursday, while Mumbai will be hot and humid, she said.—*PTI*

Constable posted at Sachin's home shoots self dead

MUMBAI, 15 MAY

A police constable who was part of the security detail posted at cricketer Sachin Tendulkar's residence here allegedly committed suicide at his hometown in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district on Wednesday, an official said. Prakash Govind Kapade,39, who was attached to the State Reserve Police Force (SRPF), shot himself using his service revolver in the early hours, said the police official. As per the preliminary probe, he got up around 1.30am and shot himself in the head, the official said.Others in the house woke up hearing the gunshot and found him lying in a pool of blood. Kapade was rushed to hospital but was declared dead before arrival, the official said. No suicide note was found, the official added. —*PTI*

Amid US threat of sanction, EAM backs Chabahar deal

India signed a 10 pact to operate the Iranian port

KOLKATA, 15 MAY

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that in the past, even the US has been appreciative of the fact that the Chabahar port has a larger relevance PHOTO: PTI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said the Chabahar port would benefit the entire region and a narrow view should not be taken of it, after the US warned that any country having business dealings with Iran runs the "potential risk of sanctions".

Speaking at a programme in Kolkata on Tuesday night, he said that in the past, even the US has been appreciative of the fact that the Chabahar port has a larger relevance.

India on Monday signed a 10-year contract to operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar that will help New Delhi expand trade with Central Asia.

"We had a long association with the Chabahar port but we could never sign a long-term agreement. The reason was there were various problems... Finally, we were able to sort this out and we were able to get the long-term agreement done. A long-term agreement is necessary because without it we cannot improve the port operations. And, the port operations, we believe, will benefit the entire region," Jaishankar said.

Located in Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman -- which New Delhi had proposed to develop way back in 2003 -- will provide Indian goods a gateway to reach landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia using a road and rail project called International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), bypassing Pakistan.

US sanctions on Iran over its suspected nuclear programme had slowed the development of the port.

"We're aware of these reports that Iran and India have signed a deal concerning the Chabahar port. I will let the government of India speak to its own foreign policy goals vis-a-vis the Chabahar port as well as its bilateral relationship with Iran," US State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel told reporters at his daily news conference on Monday.

- India on Monday signed a 10-year contract to operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar that will help New Delhi expand trade with Central Asia

India and Iran have projected the port as a key hub for the 7,200-km-long INSTC -- a multi-mode transport project for moving freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

The long-term agreement was signed by Indian Ports Global Limited (IPGL) and the Port and Maritime Organisation of Iran, an official statement said. —*PTI*

TRAGEDY IN MUMBAI

At least 14 were killed and 76 others injured when a 100-foot tall illegal billboard fell on a petrol pump in Ghatkopar area of Mumbai PHOTO: PTI

Hoarding crash: NDRF rules out finding survivors

MUMBAI, 15 MAY

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), which is engaged in the search and rescue operation at the hoarding collapse site in Mumbai's Ghatkopar, on Wednesday said the number of casualties going up in the tragedy cannot be ruled out as the chances of finding survivors are slim.

Two teams of the NDRF along with the fire brigade and police have been working relentlessly since the last two days to rescue the people trapped under the billboard that collapsed on a petrol pump in Chheda Nagar area of Ghatkopar on Monday evening due to gusty winds and unseasonal rains.

So far, the search and rescue teams have pulled out 89 persons from under the collapsed hoarding, of whom 14 were declared dead while 75 others were injured. Two more bodies have been located under the debris, but they are yet to be pulled out, officials said.

"Heavy machinery has been deployed for clearing and lifting the steel structure and girder of the billboard that collapsed on the petrol pump and a parking lot," an NDRF official said.

"The probability of more casualties cannot be ruled out as the chances of finding people alive are slim," he said.

Cutting and drilling equipment are not being used due to the presence of the petrol pump there. Also, fuel has leaked from damaged vehicles that were struck under the 120x120-feet billboard, he said. —*PTI*

YOUTHS RAISE VOICE

All Assam Students' Union activists stage a protest against the rising prices of food items, fuel and other consumer goods, in Guwahati on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

1 official killed, 14 rescued after lift collpases in Rajasthan mine

JAIPUR, 15 MAY

Hindustan Copper Limited's Chief Vigilance Officer Upendra Kumar Pandey died after a lift collapsed at a mine in Rajasthan's Neem Ka Thana, police said on Wednesday.

Fourteen others who were trapped in the mine were rescued and sent to a hospital in Jaipur for treatment, they said.

Additional Director General (ADG) Anil Paliwal said the rescue team recovered the body of Chief Vigilance Officer Pandey from the mine.

A team of 15 personnel had gone down the mine for an inspection and while returning, the cable of the cage broke due to which the cage fell down. They were stuck in a depth of around 1,875 feet.

Rescue work underway after a lift collapsed at Kolihan mine, in Jhunjhunu district, Rajasthan, on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

- A vigilance team had come from Kolkata for inspection of the mine. It was accompanied by local unit personnel during the inspection

The rescue team rescued the personnel in multiple rounds on Wednesday, police said.

A vigilance team had come from Kolkata for inspection of the mine.

It was accompanied by local unit personnel during the inspection. —*PTI*

Amid trolling, Kerala politicians back Mammootty

T'PURAM, 15 MAY

Politicians from the Left and the Congress party in Kerala have rallied behind Malayalam superstar Mammootty who is facing online harassment from certain right wing sympathisers in connection with one of his movies that had been released two years ago.

The controversy erupted after posts on on social media platforms claimed that the movie 'Puzhu' released in 2022 was an anti-Brahmanical one.

Some of them even used Mammootty's birth name, Muhammed Kutty, to criticise the national award-winning actor in connection with the film, which was a psychological drama directed by debutant filmmaker Ratheena PT.

The row erupted following a recent interview given by the woman director's husband to an online channel in which he claimed that the movie was against a particular community and criticised Mammootty over doing the film. —*PTI*

Delhi asks Iran to release 40 detained Indian seafarers

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

India has asked Iran to release nearly 40 Indian seafarers who were detained from four different merchant ships seized by the Persian Gulf country over the past eight months on different charges, sources said on Wednesday.

Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal made the request during a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Tehran on Monday.

Sonowal was in Tehran where India signed a 10-year contract to operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar that will help expand the trade with Central Asia.

India has asked Iran to release 40 Indian seafarers who were detained for past eight months under different charges PHOTO: X

Following a request of Iranian side, a meeting was held between Sonowal and Abdollahian where bilateral issues were discussed, sources privy to the development said.

During the meeting, Sonowal requested Abdollahian to release all Indian seafarers who are in Iranian custody.

Abdollahian said Tehran is positive on the release of the Indian seafarers but it is getting delayed as legal procedures have to be followed, the sources said.

The sources said the Indian seafarers were working in four ships -- Steven, Global Cherylyn, Margol and MSC Aries -- which were seized by Iran over the past eight months on different charges.

According to the sources, Steven was seized by the Iranian Coast Guard on September 12, 2023, for "smuggling" and the crew were also detained. —*PTI*

CJI BATS FOR TECH AT J20

'SC heard 7.5L cases via video conference'

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud said on Wednesday the Supreme Court has heard over 7,50,000 cases via video-conferencing and more than 1,50,000 cases were filed online as technology has re-negotiated the relationship between law and enforcement agencies, including the judiciary.

Addressing the J20 Summit at Rio de Janeiro on 'Digital transformation and the use of technology to enhance judicial efficiency', the CJI referred to India's achievements and said, "Virtual hearings have democratised access to the Supreme Court."

J20 is a summit of the heads of supreme courts or the constitutional courts of G20 member states and is being organised by the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court in light of Brazil's Presidency of G20 this year.

CJI DY Chandrachud said Supreme Court's Case Management System has been developed on Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) PHOTO: PTI

The CJI said the Indian Supreme Court's Case Management System has been developed on Free and Open Source Software (FOSS), and is "the largest case management system in the world".

Justice Chandrachud also said that even after the pandemic, hybrid hearings continue to be a feature of Indian courts, and the virtual hearings have opened up the space for people who face difficulties in physically appearing before the courts.

"Technology has re-negotiated our relationship with the law and the institutions that enforce it," Chandrachud said, adding, "Judges are after all perhaps the only public functionaries who are perched on a raised platform, who punish for contempt and make important decisions about the lives of others in discrete private chambers, without the fear of electoral losses."

He said the top court was using software -- SUVAS (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software) -- to translate judgments in 16 regional languages.

"Over 36,000 cases have thus far been translated. There is also live-streaming and YouTube recordings of important constitutional cases that provide the complete context. Easy access to the judgments of the Supreme Court is provided for through Digital SCR (Supreme Court Records), where over 30,000 old judgements are available for free," the CJI said.

Observing that the judges are "neither princes nor sovereigns who are above the explainability requirement", he said the judiciary is the service provider and enabler of the rights-affirming societies. —*PTI*

Assault on newly-wed Kerala woman: Panel slams police

T'PURAM/KOZHIKODE, 15 MAY

The Kerala Women's Commission on Wednesday slammed the police for its stand with regard to a newly-wed woman's complaint accusing her husband of brutally assaulting and attempting to kill her over dowry.

Kerala Women's Commission (KWC) chairperson P Satheedevi said police officers who think that husbands have a right to do bodily harm to their wives "are an insult to the force" and emphasised the need for gender sensitisation training of Kerala police personnel.

She told reporters in the state capital that the KWC received a complaint on behalf of the victim yesterday and immediately the SHO of the Pantheerankavu police station, within whose jurisdiction the groom's family resides, was called to find out the details.

"The complaint we got contained serious allegations of severe cruelty against the woman at her matrimonial home and that she was hospitalised in connection with that.

However, when she went to the police station, her claims were not taken seriously.

"Instead, what I came to understand is that, the police advocated that the woman settle the matter and continue to live with her husband despite facing such cruelty," Satheedevi said.

She said she had come to know through news reports that the investigating officer and his team have been replaced with other officers and termed it a welcome move.

On Tuesday, after the allegations by the bride and her family surfaced and were aired on TV channels, the Kerala State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) registered a case on its own and ordered an investigation. —*PTI*

TROUBLED WATERS

About 100 Filipino activists and fishermen, along with journalists, sailed Wednesday to a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, where Beijing's coast guard and suspected militia ships have used powerful water cannons to ward off what they regard as intruders
PHOTO: PTI

Climate crisis made April heatwave 45 times more likely

Overall 1.53 lakh excess deaths occurring every summer, close to half from Asia ***PHOTO: ANI***

More than 1.53 lakh deaths a year were associated with heatwaves around the world, with over a fifth of these deaths - the greatest share - coming from India, according to new research looking at data over 30 years since 1990.

India was followed by China and Russia, with each experiencing roughly 14 per cent and 8 per cent of these heatwave-linked excess deaths, respectively.

The study, led by Monash University, Australia, found that heatwave-linked excess deaths accounted for about a third of all heat-related deaths and 1 per cent of total deaths globally.

Researchers also found that of the overall 1.53 lakh excess deaths occurring every summer, close to half came from Asia and more than 30 per cent from Europe.

Further, the largest estimated death rates (deaths per population) were seen in regions with dry climates and lower-middle incomes. The findings are published in PLoS Medicine.

"During the warm seasons from 1990 to 2019, heatwave-related excess deaths accounted for 153,078 deaths per year, a total of 236 deaths per ten million residents or 1 per cent of global deaths," the authors wrote.

For the study, the researchers used data from the UK-based Multi-Country Multi-City (MCC) Collaborative Research Network that included daily deaths and temperatures from 750 locations in 43 countries.

Comparing the decade up to 2019 with that up to 1999, the duration of heat waves each year was found to have extended from 13.4 to 13.7 days on average around the world, with average ambient temperature warming by 0.35 degrees Celsius every decade.

The researchers said that while previous studies have quantified excess deaths due to heatwaves locally, they have not compared these estimates across the globe over a prolonged duration.

The findings show that government actions taken to enhance health sector adaptation and resilience can have potential benefits, the authors said.

They called for a "comprehensive approach" tackling not only immediate health risks during heatwaves but also implementing long-term strategies to minimise vulnerability and inequalities across communities.

Meanwhile in another study, Annu Mishra kept her modest food stall shut as temperatures in Odisha's Bhubaneswar remained above 40 degrees Celsius for 17 consecutive days in April. This streak was the longest since 1969, severely impacting health and livelihoods.

"The crippling heat made it extremely difficult to stand near the gas stove," said 51-year-old Mishra, noting that the only time her food stall remained shut for such a long duration was during Cyclone Fani in 2019.

Similar heatwaves could occur once every 30 years and they have already become about 45 times more likely due to climate change, leading climate scientists said on Wednesday, citing historical weather data.

The team of scientists, called the World Weather Attribution (WWA) group, emphasized that heatwaves intensified by climate change are making life much tougher for people living in poverty across Asia.

Amid a prevailing but weakening El Nino and the increasing concentration of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, millions of people in South Asia endured brutal heat in April.

Record-smashing maximum temperatures were logged in parts of India, prompting health warnings from government agencies and some states to suspend in-person classes in schools.

The oppressive heat also shattered temperature records in the Philippines, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar.

In West Asia, including Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, April heatwaves with temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius have become more frequent due to climate change.

As global average temperatures have risen by 1.2 degrees Celsius compared to the cooler pre-industrial climate, scientists predict that West Asia is expected to experience similar heatwaves about once every 10 years. If warming reaches 2 degrees Celsius, similar heatwaves will occur about once every five years.

Heatwaves can be deadly, with the elderly and children particularly at risk of heat exhaustion and heatstroke. According to the World Health Organization, more than 166,000 people died as a result of heatwaves between 1998 and 2017.

Extreme temperatures can also impact economies. People are less productive during hot weather, even if they work indoors, while children struggle to learn in extreme heat.

In Bhubaneswar, Mishra suffered a loss of Rs 20,000 due to keeping her food stall shut during the prolonged heat wave spell (16 days), the longest since April 2016.

Experts suggest that the population aged above 65 and below 15 needs special attention in terms of preparedness to reduce the impact of extreme heat on health.

The WWA emphasised that some countries, such as India, have comprehensive heat action plans in place.

Yet, to protect some of the most vulnerable people, these plans must be expanded with mandatory regulations, such as workplace interventions for all workers to address heat stress. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساڈا

'Gen Zs, millennials globally optimistic about economy'

More than half of Gen Zs and two-thirds of millennials globally are optimistic about the economic and social situation of the country and expect it to improve further, a Deloitte survey said on Wednesday.

Both generations are optimistic about GenAI and its potential benefits in improving the way they work with 4 in 10 undergoing training, the Deloitte's 2024 Gen Z and millennial survey said.

The survey also found that nine in 10 Gen Zs and millennials say the purpose is important for job satisfaction and are likely to reject work or employers that do not align with their ethics and beliefs.

The survey gathers insights from more than 22,800 Gen Z and millennial respondents across 44 countries and explores how Gen Zs and millennials perceive the transformations occurring in the world around them.

Fieldwork for the survey was completed between 24 November, 2023 and 13 February, 2024. Gen Z respondents were born between January 1995 and December 2005 and the millennial respondents between January 1983 and December 1994.

According to the survey, millennials are feeling more optimistic about the overall economic, financial, and social outlook compared with their global counterparts and this sentiment is boosted by India's sustained economic growth amid a global slowdown.

Two-thirds of millennials (65 per cent) and more than half of the Gen Zs (58 per cent) expect the country's economic outlook to improve in the next one year. It is a significantly better situation compared with the previous year, as more Gen Zs (62 per cent) and millennials (64 per cent) are now confident of their financial situation.

Both generations are optimistic about GenAI ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

- More than half of the respondents are excited about GenAI and believe that this new technology will positively impact their work-life balance

As per the survey, both the generations believe GenAI will have a positive impact on their work-life balance and how they work. More than half of the Gen Zs (51 per cent) and millennials (54 per cent) frequently use GenAI at work and strongly feel that it will free up their time for creative and strategic work.

However, they are equally convinced that they will need to reskill and GenAI will influence their career decisions and cause some job loss. The survey also highlights how women are more upbeat about GenAI and slightly more comfortable working with it than men.

"Millennials and Gen Zs are the agents of change and contribute significantly to shaping the future of work. More than half of the respondents are excited about GenAI and believe that this new technology will positively impact their work-life balance, allowing more time for creative and strategic work", Deloitte India Chief People and Experience Officer Deepti Sagar said. *—PTI*

Two-thirds of millennials (65 per cent) and more than half of the Gen Zs (58 per cent) expect the country's economic outlook to improve in the next one year ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Here's how global spice powerhouse is in deep trouble

For Indians, spices are like paints in a paint box", says Indian actor-turned-food writer Madhur Jaffrey. "We get different shades from the same spice by doing something to the spice."

In other words, you can roast the spices or grind them into powders. The diversity of their flavours is mind-boggling. Indian spices enhance pickles and season meat. They flavour savouries and street food. Zesty spices energise local fruit drinks and add a tangy twist to fruits and salads.

Unsurprisingly, India has emerged as a global spice powerhouse. It exports more than 200 spices and value-added products to some 180 countries, worth $4bn (£.1bn), according to the Spices Board of India. The domestic market alone is worth a staggering $10bn, making it the world's largest consumer of spices.

But now, concerns are emerging regarding the safety of these renowned spices. Last month, Singapore and Hong Kong halted sales of some spices produced by Indian companies MDH and Everest over suspected elevated levels of ethylene oxide, a cancer-causing pesticide.

That's not all. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is also investigating products from the two popular brands for potentially containing the pesticide, an FDA spokesperson told Reuters. An analysis done by the news agency of the US regulatory data found that since 2021, an average of 14.5% of US shipments of MDH spices were rejected due to presence of bacteria. Both brands insist that their products are safe.

The European Union (EU) has raised concerns of its own, discovering the same cancer-causing substance in samples of chilli peppers and peppercorns from India. Reports say that the Maldives, Bangladesh and Australian food regulators have also launched investigations.

India: Global spice powerhouse

•India exports nearly $4bn worth of spices, accounting for 12% of global spice exports

•Major spices exported include chilli powder, cumin, turmeric, cardamom and mixed spice

•Other notable exports include asafoetida, saffron, anise, nutmeg, clove and cinnamon

•China, the US and Bangladesh are the biggest markets for Indian spices

•Other significant markets include the UAE, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the UK, Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong

Few countries halted sales of MDH and Everest over suspected elevated levels of ethylene oxide, a cancer-causing pesticide ***PHOTO: X/ @GUPTAJI_JOURNO***

Clearly, it is a disturbing development. For one, both the brands are popular and trusted ones. Delhi-based MDH, an iconic 105-year-old family-run firm, offers a range of more than 60 blended and ground spices. The 57-year-old Everest Food Products, launched by a spice trader, claims to be India's "largest manufacturer of pure and blended spices", exporting to over 80 countries. Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan, Bollywood superstars, have served as Everest's brand ambassadors.

To be sure, this is not the first time Indian spices have been found to be contaminated. In 2014, Ipsita Mazumdar, a biochemistry expert, tested popular spice brands in Kolkata which made chilli, cumin, curry powder, and garam masala. She found lead in the food colouring used to give the spices vibrant orange or red hues. And more recently in April, food and drugs control authorities in Gujarat seized more than 60,000kg of adulterated spices - chilli powder, turmeric and coriander power and pickle masala.

So are Indian spices safe? The federal government has instructed all state governments to conduct quality tests. The Spices Board - which has five quality evaluation labs - has issued guidelines to exporters to check for use of ethylene oxide. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is also testing samples. India's health ministry claims the country has one of the world's strictest Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) standards, with pesticides' MRLs varying by food commodity and determined through rigorous risk assessments. But something is clearly amiss: in 2022, the FDA highlighted inadequate sanitary facilities, accommodation, and equipment cleanliness standards at a premier Indian spice plant.

"India has been a spice exporter for centuries. But this image has been declining in the last few years, with the government's inadequate attention. We do not yet know at which stage the contamination is happening. Ethylene oxide is not used by farmers. It is most probably a post-harvest, post-processing residue," says Narasimha Reddy Donthi, an independent researcher and environmental justice activist.

"It is not only the negative attention. Repeated cases of excessive residues can have a long-term effect. In the past, mango exports to the US suffered for years due to pesticide residues," Mr Reddy adds.

Delhi-based think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) believes the recent quality concerns could threaten half of India's spice exports due to "cascading regulatory actions in many countries".

If China questions the quality of Indian spices, over half of India's global exports could be affected, joining five other countries, the GTRI said in a recent report. "The situation could worsen if the EU, which regularly rejects Indian spice consignments over quality issues, follows suits."

For spice enthusiasts in the West, the origin of the spices in their food remains unclear.

In the end, experts say, India must fundamentally overhaul its approach to food safety, prioritising transparency, stringent enforcement and clear communication to safeguard the integrity of its exports.

—BBC News

PHOTO: X@utopiacircle

Baltimore collapse: Ship lost power before hitting bridge

BALTIMORE, 15 MAY

Investigators probing the March collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore said in a preliminary report on Tuesday the cargo ship Dali experienced an electrical blackout about 10 hours before leaving the Port of Baltimore while undergoing maintenance. The power outage was caused by a crewmember mistakenly closing an exhaust damper, causing the ship's engine to stall, the report issued by the National Transportation Safety Board said. The ship lost power again and crashed into one of the bridge's supporting columns shortly after leaving the port on 26 March, which brought the bridge down in seconds. A full investigation could take a year or more, the agency said. *—AP*

Indian-origin man in Singapore sentenced to jail

SINGAPORE, 15 MAY

An Indian-origin man, employed in the Singapore Air Force, was on Wednesday sentenced to 11 months in jail for phishing women's social media login details to get their intimate images. K Eshwaran, 26, pleaded guilty to 10 charges under the Computer Misuse Act. Another 21 charges were considered for sentencing, Channel News Asia reported. From 2019 to 2023, he sent phishing links to 22 victims to get login credentials for their social media, cloud server and email accounts. Eshwaran targeted victims whom he knew in real life or victims whose intimate images had been posted to an adult forum, prosecutors said. The identities of all his victims were protected by a court order, which the prosecution requested given the sexual element of his offences. *—PTI*

Indonesia seeds clouds to block rainfall

TANAH DATAR, 15 MAY

Indonesian authorities seeded clouds on Wednesday, trying to prevent further rain and flash floods after deluges that hit the country's Sumatra Island over the weekend left at least 58 people dead and another 35 missing. Monsoon rains triggered a landslide of mud and cold lava from Mount Marapi, eventually causing rivers to breach their banks. The deluge tore through mountainside villages in four districts in West Sumatra province just before midnight on Saturday. The floods swept away people and 79 homes and submerged hundreds of houses and buildings, forcing more than 1,500 families to flee to temporary government shelters. *—PTI*

Dutch anti-Islam party to form EU's hard-right govt

BRUSSELS, 15 MAY

Anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders is on the verge of brokering a four-party coalition in the Netherlands six months after coming in first in national elections, opening the prospect that yet another European Union nation will veer toward the hard right weeks ahead of EU-wide elections. Wilders has said he does not expect to become prime minister himself, because he remains too extreme for his coalition partners, but his Party for Freedom would be the driving force in a four-party coalition. With hard right and populist parties now part of or leading a half dozen governments in the 27-nation bloc, they appear positioned to make gains in the June 6-9 EU polls. "I hope we will get there. I think we will get there. I cannot see it going wrong," Wilders told the broadcaster NOS early Wednesday after the four parties reached a deal on government financing, the last major stumbling bloc in the talks. *—AP*

Biden plans to send $1bn arms shipment to Israel

Experts said weapons transfers have become a political liability for him

WASHINGTON, 15 MAY

The White House has told Congress it wants to send more than $1bn (£800m) in new weapons to Israel.

This comes despite the US being opposed to a full-scale invasion by the Israeli military on the southern Gaza city of Rafah. It said last week it had paused a shipment of bombs to Israel over concerns civilians would be killed if used in densely populated areas. The new package, confirmed by US media, must still be approved by lawmakers.

It would include $700m in tank ammunition, $500m in tactical vehicles and $60m in mortar rounds, according to Associated Press news agency. On Tuesday, Israeli tanks advanced deeper into residential areas in the south-east of the Gazan city.

Last month, Congress passed a bill providing $95bn in aid to Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan. A US state department report last week found that some American-made weapons provided to Israel may have been used in breach of international law.

It added that assurances it had received from Israel about adhering to the legal use of US weapons were "credible and reliable". The package being sent to Congress is the first since Biden's administration paused arms transfers to Israel last week.

He said he had delayed the shipment of 2,000lb (900kg) bombs to Israel because of how they might be used in such a ground operation. Asked by CNN about the delay, Biden said: "Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs."

Weapons transfers to Israel have become a political liability for Biden ahead of this November's 2024 White House election. News of the latest arms package emerged soon after voting ended in a presidential primary election in Maryland, where activists had urged voters to register a protest ballot against what they see as Mr Biden's favouritism towards Israel over the Gaza war. Republican lawmakers in Congress have introduced legislation intended to prevent any further pauses in weapons shipments to the US ally.

—BBC News

An Israeli mobile artillery unit fires a shell from southern Israel towards the Gaza Strip, in a position near the Israel-Gaza border on Wednesday

PHOTO: AP/PTI

Pak politicians named in Dubai property data ownership report

ISLAMABAD, 15 MAY

- The data, released on Tuesday, provides a detailed overview of hundreds of thousands of properties in Dubai and information about their ownership or usage, largely from 2020 and 2022

In the wake of an astounding volume of released data regarding properties owned by foreigners in Dubai, some of the Pakistani politicians named in it have downplayed the development, claiming that there was nothing wrong with the practice and that properties under their name were already declared.

The data, released on Tuesday, provides a detailed overview of hundreds of thousands of properties in Dubai and information about their ownership or usage, largely from 2020 and 2022. It was obtained by the Center for Advanced Defence Studies (C4ADS), a non-profit organisation based in Washington, DC, that researches international crime and conflict.

Prominent names include PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, his siblings Bakhtawar Bhutto Zardari and Aseefa Bhutto Zardari; wife of Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Ms Ashraf; Sindh Information Minister Sharjeel Memon; MNA Ikhtiar Baig; son of PML-N President Nawaz Sharif, Hussain Nawaz; son of General (retd) Qamar Javed Bajwa, Saad Siddique Bajwa; Senator Faisal Vawda, Sardar Sanaullah Zehri, Akhtar Mengal and PML-N MNA Ehsanul Haq Bajwa.

Other prominent individuals whose names appear in the leaks include former Balochistan chief minister Sardar Aslam Raisani, media house owner Salman Iqbal, Farhat Shahzadi aka Farah Gogi, former minister Marvi Memon, Lt Gen (retd) Muhammad Afzal Muzaffar, IG police AJK Tajik Sohail Aziz, MNA Amer Ali Magsi, MPA Sheikh M Mugheri and former MPA Sardar Khan Chandio. Bilawal's spokesperson Zulfikar Ali Bader had said that the former foreign minister and Aseefa had already declared all their domestic and foreign property with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and Federal Board of Revenue.

—Courtesy, Dawn

French Prez convenes top ministers to discuss spiralling violence

PARIS, 15 MAY

At least two people were killed and three were seriously injured overnight in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia, French media reported Wednesday, as President Emmanuel Macron convened a meeting of top ministers to discuss the spiralling violence.

It was the third day of violent unrest over a constitutional reform pushed by Paris that has roiled the archipelago, which has long sought independence. The special defence and security council meeting called by Macron on Wednesday typically brings together a limited group of officials, including Prime Minister Gabriel Attal and the ministers for defence, interior, economy and foreign affairs.

On Tuesday, the French Interior Ministry sent police reinforcements to New Caledonia, which long served as a prison colony and now hosts a French military base. Four mobile gendarmerie squadrons are being deployed as reinforcements, including 15 gendarmes from an elite intervention unit.

President Emmanuel Macron

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

French broadcaster BFM reported that two people had been killed and three gravely injured in the unrest overnight. French authorities in the territory said more than 130 people have been arrested since Monday in the violence that has raged across the archipelago, with decades of tensions between indigenous Kanaks seeking independence and descendants of colonisers who want to remain part of France.

Clashes between police and protesters have continued in and around the capital, Nouméa, despite a curfew and ban on gatherings. Schools have been closed "until further notice" and the main airport, La Tontoura, "remains closed to commercial flights."

—AP

11 die in South Mexico shootings

MERIDA, 15 MAY

Eleven people were killed Tuesday in mass shootings in a small town in the southern Mexico state of Chiapas, the state prosecutor's office said. The office said the shooting occurred in the township of Chicomuselo, an area known as a trafficking route for migrant and drug smuggling that has been hit by cartel turf battles. The township — and the outlying hamlet of Morelia, where the killings occurred — is in a sparsely populated area near Mexico's border with Guatemala. Some of the victims of shootings appeared to be simply residents of the town. *—AP*

NO CASUALTIES REPORTED

Russia downs 10 US-made missiles over Crimea

KYIV, 15 MAY

Russia's Defence Ministry said air defences shot down 10 US-supplied Ukrainian missiles targeting Crimea early Wednesday just as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was visiting Kyiv.

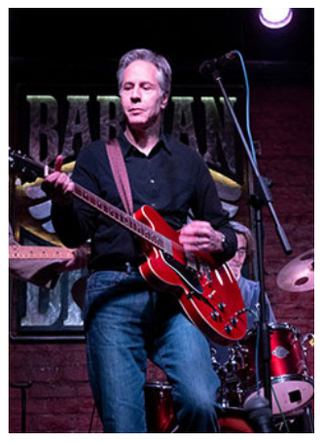
The ministry said 10 US-supplied Ukrainian ATACMS missiles were destroyed over the Black Sea over Crimea. Sevastopol Gov Mikhail Razvozhayev said air defences shot down several Ukrainian missiles over the Black Sea and near the Belbek air base. The fragments of downed missiles fell into residential areas but caused no casualties, Razvozhayev said.

The Defence Ministry said that in other Ukrainian attacks, Russian air defences also shot down nine Ukrainian drones, two Vilha rockets, two anti-radar HARM missiles and two Hammer guided bombs over the Belgorod region early Wednesday. Belgorod Gov Vuacheslav Gladkov said two people were injured in the village of Dubovoye when a Ukrainian rocket set their house ablaze.

The military said five other Ukrainian drones were downed over the Kursk region and three drones were shot down over the Bryansk region. The Defence Ministry also said that another Ukrainian drone was downed over the Tatarstan region. Tatarstan is located more than 1,000 kilometres east of the border with Ukraine.Blinken, who arrived Tuesday on a two-day visit, sought to rally Ukrainians' spirits during the new Russian offensive, assuring them that they are not alone and that billions of dollars in American military aid that is on the way after months of political delays will make a "real difference" on the battlefield. *—AP*

Russia Downs Ukrainian Neptune Missile Near Crimea - MoD

PHOTO: X@GEORGEG13567824



Antony Blinken plays guitar to 'Rockin' in the Free World' at a bar in Kyiv

PHOTO: ANI

Zelenskyy postpones foreign visits

KYIV, 15 MAY

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office said Wednesday that he has postponed all his upcoming foreign visits amid a new Russian offensive. Zelenskyy cancelled all foreign visits "that were planned for the coming days," his office said Wednesday on Telegram. The head of state instructed his team to reschedule the visits. "We are grateful to our partners for understanding," the announcement said. Zelenskyy had been expected to visit Spain, and perhaps Portugal, this week. *—AP*

Putin signs decree naming new Russian government

MOSCOW, 15 MAY

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday signed a decree appointing a new government, including replacement of the defence minister with a former deputy prime minister who is an economics expert with no military background.

When Putin was inaugurated for a new six-year term on May 7, the government submitted its resignation in line with Russian law. Putin reappointed Mikhail Mishustin as prime minister three days later, which was quickly approved by the lower house of parliament.

On Sunday, he signed a decree moving Sergei Shoigu from his post as defense minister to head of the national security council. Putin also nominated deputy prime minister Andrei Belousov to take Shoigu's place.

Putin also proposed names for some Cabinet members to return to their posts and Mishustin submitted names for several new ministers, all of which were approved by the parliament. Shoigu has been widely seen as a key figure in Putin's decision to send Russian troops into Ukraine. Russia had expected the operation to quickly overwhelm Ukraine's much smaller and less-equipped army and for Ukrainians to broadly welcome Russian troops. *—AP*

WANING IMMUNITY

Why is whooping cough surging in the UK?

LONDON, 15 MAY

A large outbreak of pertussis (more commonly known as whooping cough) has been ongoing in the UK since the beginning of 2024. There have been 2,793 confirmed cases so far this year. Sadly, five infant deaths due to whooping cough have been confirmed, with unconfirmed reports that a sixth infant may have died in the last week of the bacterial infection.

This is a stark reminder that whooping cough is a very nasty infection. While the symptoms are usually mild in healthy older children and adults, it can be lethal for babies. Globally, there are an estimated 24 million cases of whooping cough each year and around 1,60,000 deaths.

Whooping cough is caused by a bacteria called Bordetella pertussis. Pertussis often begins like most other respiratory infections, with typical symptoms including a runny nose and a fever.

The distinctive "whoop" cough may only appear after a week or so of illness – though it does not occur in all cases. As such, confirming cases of whooping cough may require a laboratory test.

Whooping cough is very infectious. On average, a single case of pertussis can transmit infection on to around 15-17 other people.

This infection rate is similar to measles and higher than the Covid variants.

The reason whooping cough is so infectious is in part due to pertussis having a very long infectious period of up to five weeks – where infected people can pass the bacteria on to others. *—The Conversation*

There are an estimated 24 million cases of whooping cough each year and at least 1,60,000 deaths globally

PHOTO: UNSPLASH

Why the spike?

One slightly curious aspect of whooping cough is that there are big outbreaks typically every few years. The last sizeable outbreak in the UK was in 2016 with almost 6000 confirmed cases. A key factor is probably waning immunity at the population level. The immunity from the pertussis vaccine is initially very protective, but it does decline after the initial vaccination. This is why a consistently high vaccine uptake across the population is vital. The percentage of children vaccinated by their first birthday dropped slightly from around 93 per cent just prior to the pandemic to 92 per cent in 2022-2023.

'After crashes, Boeing violated deal to avoid trial'

WASHINGTON, 15 MAY

Boeing has violated a settlement that allowed the company to avoid criminal prosecution after two deadly crashes involving its 737 Max aircraft more than five years ago, the Justice Department told a federal judge on Tuesday.

It is now up to the Justice Department to decide whether to file charges against Boeing. Prosecutors will tell the court no later than July 7 how they plan to proceed, department said. New 737 Max jets crashed in 2018 in Indonesia and 2019 in Ethiopia, killing 346 people. Boeing reached a USD 2.5 billion settlement with the Justice Department in January 2021 to avoid prosecution on a single charge of fraud — misleading federal regulators who approved the plane.

Boeing blamed the deception on two relatively low-level employees. In a letter filed Tuesday in federal court in Texas, Glenn Leon, head of the Justice Department criminal division's fraud section, said Boeing violated terms of the settlement by failing to make promised changes to detect and prevent violations of federal anti-fraud laws.

The determination means that Boeing could be prosecuted "for any federal criminal violation of which the United States has knowledge," including the charge of fraud that the company hoped to avoid with the settlement, the Justice Department said.

However, it is not clear whether the government will prosecute Boeing. *—AP*

PHOTO: X@AJENGLISH

Rupee edges up 1 paisa to 83.50 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 15 MAY

The rupee inched up 1 paisa to settle at 83.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday as the American currency retreated from its elevated level. However, sustained foreign fund outflows and a weak trend in domestic equities weighed on the local unit. With foreign investors buying US dollars and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) selling the greenback, the USD/INR pair is expected to remain range-bound with a bit of a weakness bias, according to forex traders. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.49. During the session, it traded in a narrow range of 83.51-83.47. The domestic unit finally settled at 83.50 (provisional), higher by 1 paisa from its previous close. The rupee gained on weakness in the US Dollar. However, weak domestic markets and FII selling capped sharp gains, said Anuj Choudhary – Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. *—PTI*

Gold jumps ₹450; silver surges ₹900

NEW DELHI, 12 MAY

Gold price jumped Rs 450 to Rs 73,400 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a rally in precious metal rates internationally, according to HDFC Securities. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 73,400 per 10 grams, up by Rs 450 amid a positive trend in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. The yellow metal had closed at Rs 72,950 per 10 grams in the previous close. Silver price also surged by Rs 900 to Rs 86,900 per kg. In the previous session, it had ended at Rs 86,000 per kg. Globally, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,365 per ounce, up by USD 26 from the previous close. Gold rose during European trading hours, buoyed by a weak US dollar and falling bond yields, Gandhi said. Silver also quoted higher at USD 28.80 per ounce. In the previous session, it had ended at USD 28.35 per ounce.*—PTI*

IIFCL profit rises 44 pc to highest-ever of ₹ 1,552 crore

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) on Wednesday reported a 44 per cent jump in standalone net profit to Rs 1,552 crore for the fiscal ended March 2024 aided by an increase in lending and moderation in bad loans. The state-owned infrastructure finance company had earned a net profit of Rs 1,076 crore in the previous fiscal. The company continued to add value as its net worth increased 11 per cent to Rs 14,266 crore in 2023-24 from Rs 12,878 crore in the preceding fiscal. The cumulative sanctions and disbursements stood at Rs 2.5 lakh crore and Rs 1.28 lakh crore, respectively, as of 31 March, 2024. With regard to asset quality, IIFCL has brought down gross NPAs)to 1.61 per cent from 4.76 per cent a year ago. The net NPA of company too declined to 0.46 per cent in the year-ago period. IIFCL has funded close to 760 infra projects worth Rs 14 lakh crore till March 2024. *—PTI*

India's exports marginally up at USD 34.99 bn

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

India's merchandise exports in April 2024 marginally rose to USD 34.99 billion from USD 34.62 billion in the year-ago month, according to government data released on Wednesday. Imports too increased to USD 54.09 billion from USD 49.06 billion in April 2023. Trade deficit, or the gap between imports and exports, during the month stood at USD 19.1 billion. Briefing media on the data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said the figures show that the new fiscal year started on a good note and hoped that it continues. In March 2024, the outbound shipments dipped to USD 41.68 billion from USD 41.96 billion a year ago. *—PTI*

Coal's share in power generation drops below 50%

India is among few countries aiming to triple renewable capacity

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

The share of coal in India's total power generation capacity dipped below 50 percent in the first quarter of 2024, the first time since the 1960s.

The latest POWERup quarterly report from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) showed that renewable energy accounted for 71.5 percent of the record 13,669 megawatts (MW) power generation capacity added by India in the first quarter (January-March) of this year.

Coal's share, including lignite, in India's total power generation capacity dropped below 50 percent for the first time since the 1960s.

The report noted that the renewable energy trend is well ahead of India's target of achieving 50 percent cumulative power generation capacity from non-fossil fuel-based sources by 2030.

The decline in coal's share of power generation capacity mirrors a global trend, with demand for coal in G7 countries hitting record lows in 2023, levels not seen since 1900.

The decline in the share was for the first time since 1960s *PHOTO: PTI*

To accelerate the transition, G7 countries pledged last month to phase out all unabated coal power generation by 2035, building on their commitment to halt all construction of new coal-fired power plants.

The term "unabated" generally refers to the continued use of coal, oil, and gas without efforts to curtail emissions.

India has risen to third place in the world's solar power generation rankings, trailing only China and the US, according to Ember's fifth annual Global Electricity Review of 80 countries.

Ranked ninth in 2015, India has now overtaken Japan, which, along with fellow G7 member Germany, has a persistently high demand for coal.

- The decline in coal's share of power generation capacity mirrors a global trend, with demand for coal in G7 countries hitting record lows in 2023

Solar power generated a record 5.5 percent of global electricity in 2023, with India generating 5.8 percent of its electricity from solar last year.

Solar remained the world's fastest-growing electricity source for the 19th consecutive year in 2023, adding more than twice as much new electricity worldwide as coal.

India witnessed the world's fourth-largest increase in solar generation in 2023 (+18 terawatt hour or TWh), behind China (+156 TWh), the United States (+33 TWh), and Brazil (+22 TWh). Together, the top four solar growth countries accounted for 75 percent of growth in 2023. *—PTI*

AFTER 3 DAYS OF RALLY

Markets end lower; Sensex slips over 100 pts

MUMBAI, 15 MAY

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Wednesday after three days of rally, dragged down by selling pressure in HDFC Bank and unabated foreign fund outflows.

Halting its three-day rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 117.58 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 72,987.03. During the day, it lost 281.95 points or 0.38 per cent to 72,822.66.

The NSE Nifty dipped 17.30 points or 0.08 per cent to 22,200.55.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Motors, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank, JSW Steel, Hindustan Unilever, Nestle and Titan were the major laggards. In contrast, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, NTPC, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and HCL Technologies were among the major gainers.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. Markets in South Korea and Hong Kong were closed for a holiday.

PHOTO: PTI

European markets were trading mostly higher. Wall Street ended with gains on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.21 per cent to USD 82.55 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,065.52 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 328.48 points or 0.45 per cent to settle at 73,104.61 on Tuesday.

The NSE Nifty went up 113.80 points, or 0.51 per cent, to 22,217.85. *—PTI*

IPO SUBSCRIPTION OPEN

Go Digit raises Rs 1,176 cr from anchor investors

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Go Digit General Insurance Ltd, a firm backed by Canada-based Fairfax Group, has raised a little over Rs 1,176 crore from anchor investors.

The company has allocated 4.32 crore equity shares to 56 funds at Rs 272 apiece, which is the upper end of the price band, according to a circular uploaded late on Tuesday.

At this price, the company has mobilised Rs 1,176.59 crore from these funds.

Foreign and domestic Institutions that participated in the anchor round were -- Fidelity Investment Trust, Bay Pond Partners L.P., Goldman Sachs, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), Schroder International, East Spring Investments India, Custody Bank of Japan and Morgan Stanley Asia (Singapore) PTE ODI.

In addition, SBI Mutual Fund, ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund, Axis Mutual Fund, Mirae Asset Mutual Fund, Ashoka WhiteOak Mutual Fund, HDFC Life Insurance, ITPL Invesco India Mutual Fund, Tata Mutual Fund too were allocated shares.

Virat Kohli, Anushka Sharma's Go Digit's initial share sale was opened from Wednesday and will conclude on Friday *PHOTO: X/ @IMVKOHLI*

The company's Rs 2,615-crore initial share-sale was opened for subscription from Wednesday and will conclude on Friday. The price band has been fixed at Rs 258 to Rs 272 per share for the IPO.

Go Digit's proposed IPO comprises fresh issuance of equity shares worth Rs 1,125 crore and an Offer-for-Sale (OFS) of 5.47 crore equity shares by a promoter Go Digit Infoworks Services and existing shareholders worth Rs 1,490 crore. This takes the total IPO size to Rs 2,615 crore at the upper end of the price band.

At present, Go Digit Infoworks Services owns 83.3 per cent stake in the company.

ICICI Securities, Morgan Stanley India Company, Axis Capital, HDFC Bank, Nuvama Wealth Management and IIFL Securities are book running lead managers to Go Digit's IPO. *—PTI*

LIC gets 3 more years to meet SEBI's 10 pc norm

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) on Wednesday said markets regulator SEBI has granted an additional 3 years' time till 16 May, 2027 to comply with the 10 per cent public shareholding norm.

Currently, Government holding in LIC is 96.50 per cent, while public holding is 3.50 per cent.

"Securities and Exchange Board of India vide its letter dated 14 May, 2024 has conveyed its decision, to grant additional time of 3 years to Life Insurance Corporation of India to achieve 10 per cent public shareholding... i.e., within a period of 5 years from the date of listing," LIC said in a regulatory filing. *—PTI*

Accordingly, the revised timeline for the Corporation to achieve 10 per cent public shareholding is on or before 16 May, 2027, LIC said.

Public sector behemoth LIC listed itself on the bourses on 17 May, 2022. As per Sebi norms, LIC was required to achieve 10 per cent public shareholding within 2 years of listing in the capital market.

The government sold over 22.13 crore shares or a 3.5 per cent stake in LIC through an Initial Public Offering (IPO) which fetched the government Rs 20,557 crore. The price band of the issue was Rs 902-949 a share.

Shares of LIC jumped 3.96 per cent to Rs 967.90 a piece in afternoon trade on the BSE. *—PTI*

LIC's government holding is 96.50 per cent, public holding is 3.50 per cent *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

CANARA BANK, JSW ENERGY ADDED TO MSCI INDIA INDEX

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

IAs many as 13 companies, including Canara Bank, JSW Energy, NHPC and Jindal Stainless, will be included to the MSCI India index effective close of trade on 31 May, as per the May 2024 index review by MSCI.

The companies that are added to the MSCI India index are Bosch, Canara Bank, Indus Towers, Jindal Stainless, JSW Energy, Mankind Pharma, NHPC, PB Fintech, Phoenix Mills, Solar Industries India, Sundaram Finance, Thermax and Torrent Power, according to an announcement by index compiler MSCI.

Three companies -- Berger Paints, Indraprastha Gas and One97 Communications -- will move out of the index, it announced.

Some of the companies that were added to the index were trading with gains on the BSE.

Shares of Thermax zoomed 8 per cent, Canara Bank climbed over 4 per cent, PB Fintech rallied more than 4 per cent, Sundaram Finance advanced over 2 per cent, Indus Towers traded nearly 1 per cent higher and Torrent Power quoted 1 per cent up.

MSCI Global Standard Index is widely used by global fund houses for benchmarking global equities portfolios. *—PTI*

Govt asks mining industry to look for assets abroad

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

The government on Wednesday said public sector companies -- Coal India, NMDC and ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), will start looking actively for critical mineral assets overseas.

ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) is the overseas investment arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation.

These PSUs already have some kind of presence abroad.

State-owned Coal India, he said, is actively pursuing some lithium blocks in Chile.

Meanwhile, Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) is a joint venture of three PSUs formed to scout for mineral assets overseas. It is owned by three public sector undertakings — National Aluminium Company Ltd (Nalco), Hindustan Copper Ltd (HCL) and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Ltd (MECL).

India is looking for tie ups with Chile for getting access to copper and lithium mineral assets in the country.

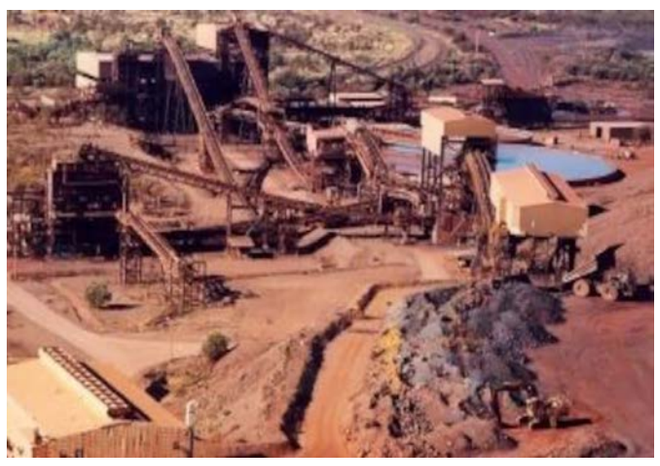
- India is looking for tie ups with Chile for getting access to copper and lithium mineral assets in the country. It has also been looking at Austrlia for lithium blocks since a long time

India has been looking at Australia for lithium blocks for a long time. This year, the secretary said "we aim to do something in Australia."

India, he also said, is looking at some coal and copper assets in Mongolia and the government is studying trade routes with the landlocked country.

The secretary explained that India is also exploring joint exploration with Zambia for critical minerals, including lithium.

Critical minerals such as copper, lithium, nickel and cobalt are important components in rapidly growing clean energy technologies -- from wind turbines and electricity networks to electric vehicles. *—PTI*



Coal India is actively pursuing lithium blocks in Chile *PHOTO: PTI*

Sebi eases KYC compliance guidelines

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

Markets regulator Sebi has decided to simplify the risk management framework for validating Know Your Customer (KYC) records through KYC Registration Agencies (KRAs), a move that will ensure ease of transacting for investors, experts said on Wednesday. Under the new framework, KRAs can now verify PAN, name, address, email, and mobile number from official databases. If these details are found to be in order, they will be considered validated records, Ankit Ratan, Co-founder & CEO, Signzy said. The exchanges, depositories, and relevant intermediaries are tasked with implementing necessary technical changes in their systems by May-end. Mutual fund houses, broking firms, and portfolio management service providers will need to implement robust compliance tools and risk management to safeguard investor data privacy and security. *—PTI*

TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

Govt aims to boost use of AI in food processing

NEW DELHI, 15 MAY

India plans to accelerate the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the food processing sector to improve efficiency, enhance farmers' incomes and reduce the environmental impact, officials said on Wednesday.

At a conference organised by NIFTEM (National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management) on using frontier technologies in the sector, senior bureaucrats and government advisors stressed the need for a roadmap to deploy AI tools, which are still at a nascent stage in the country's massive food processing industry.

"As an industry, we need to create a roadmap. The MEITY secretary has come on board. I am sure he is going to be a big support in this endeavour," Food Processing Secretary Anita Praveen said, referring to the secretary of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY).

MEITY Secretary S Krishnan pitched for wider adoption of AI, saying some work was already happening in agriculture but the food processing sector was still in early stages of using such technologies.

The food processing sector was still in early stages of using such technologies *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

- Senior bureaucrats and government advisors stressed the need for a roadmap to deploy AI tools, which are still at a nascent stage in the country's massive food processing industry

NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand said efficient food processing was "climate smart", helping enhance farmer incomes, satisfy consumers and reduce environmental impact amid increasing climate change challenges.

He suggested using AI to develop simple portable devices for quality assaying of agricultural produce, which could be a "great service to the nation". "Can we think of low-scale devices to check the quality of the produce? In the absence of assaying devices, we are still focusing on quantity rather than quality," Chand said. The officials said AI tools could help improve overall sector efficiency as India aims to reach net zero emissions by 2070. *—ANI*

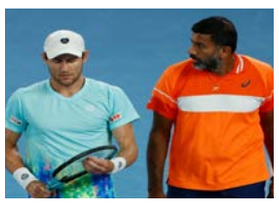


PHOTO: AFP

Bopanna-Ebden pair bows out of Italian Open

ROME, 15 MAY

The Indo-Australian pair of Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden bowed out of the ATP Italian Open following a pre-quarterfinal loss to local hopes Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori here. The second seeds went down 2-6 4-6 in a match that lasted one hour and 13 minutes on Tuesday. They had defeated wildcards Matteo Arnaldi and Francesco Passaro in their opening-round clash. It was a disappointing day for Bopanna and Ebden, who were broken twice in the first set. Their opponents, however, did not concede a single breakpoint in the opener. The Indo-Australian combination also double-faulted twice to concede the early initiative.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Is Tiger Woods next US Ryder Cup captain?

LOUISVILLE, 15 MAY

Tiger Woods brings a lot of uncertainty to Valhalla for the PGA Championship. Some of that has to do with his achy body. And some of that involved the Ryder Cup. The PGA of America still has not settled on a captain for the 2025 matches at Bethpage Black, with Woods as the most obvious candidate. Seth Waugh, CEO of the PGA of America, had said he would be speaking to Woods. "We're still talking," Woods said Tuesday. "There's nothing that has been confirmed yet. We're still working on what that might look like also whether or not I have the time to do it."—*AP*

Shaheen, Babar and Rizwan outclass Ireland

DUBLIN, 15 MAY

L An imperiously accurate bowling spell from Shaheen Shah Afridi and quick half-centuries from Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam took Pakistan to a six-wicket win over Ireland to complete a 2-1 T20I series victory in Dublin on Tuesday. Ireland, inspired by a 41-ball 73 from stand-in captain Lorcan Tucker, put up a competitive 178. But Babar and Rizwan made light work of what was, in truth, a below-par total, and another tame bowling performance and sloppy fielding effort from Ireland meant the result was beyond doubt long before the winning runs were struck. Pakistan 181 for 4 (Babar 75, Rizwan 56, Mark Adair 3-28) beat Ireland 178 for 7 (Tucker 73, Balbirnie 35, Tector 30*, Shaheen 3-14, Abbas 2-43) by six wickets.—*AP*

Anjum, Aishwary top third 3P Olympic Selection Trial

BHOPAL, 15 MAY

Anjum Moudgil and Aishwarya Pratap Singh Tomar came out on top of the women's and men's 50m rifle 3 positions Olympic Selection Trial (OST) T3 qualification round respectively at the M.P. State Shooting Academy (MPSSA) ranges here on Wednesday. After the customary 20 shots in the kneeling, prone, and standing positions, Anjum shot a score of 592/600, her highest of the OSTs so far, while Aishwarya shot yet another quality score of 590 to top the five-man field.
—*AP*

IPL: Sunrisers Hyderabad look to seal playoff berth

Gujarat aims to end the campaign on a high

Gill and Pat Cummins PHOTO: BCCI/IPL

HYDERABAD, 15 MAY

Masters of their fate right now despite being erratic, Sunrisers Hyderabad will hope their destructive batting line-up delivers when they take on Gujarat Titans in pursuit of a playoff berth in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

Another win will be enough for the Sunrisers to seal a playoff berth as they need only one point to ensure qualification. But the Pat Cummins-led side will also want to challenge for the top two spots, which is a possibility considering they have one more game after this match and a healthy net run rate of +0.406.

SRH has 14 points from 12 matches and can reach a maximum of 18 points, which may be enough to ensure a top-two finish if other results go their way.

Not only are the Sunrisers players well-rested ahead of the clash against GT as they got a week off, but their morale will also be sky-high after notching yet another record-breaking win against Lucknow Super Giants on May 8. If the bowlers did a commendable job to restrict LSG to a below-par score, the opening duo of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma made a mockery of the hosts by chasing down 166 in just 9.4 overs to notch a 10-wicket win at home. SRH have made a habit of securing unbelievable victories throughout the season but they have also suffered sizeable defeats, including against GT (by 7 wickets). —*PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad

THAILAND OPEN

Satwik-Chirag sail into 2nd round, Prannoy loses

BANGKOK, 15 MAY

Star Indian pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty progressed to the men's doubles pre-quarterfinals but it was curtains for fifth seed HS Prannoy after being stunned by compatriot Meiraba Luwang Maisnam in the men's singles opening round of Thailand Open here on Wednesday.

Top seeds Satwik and Chirag took just 34 minutes to get past the Malaysian pair of Nur Mohd Azriyn Ayub Azriyn and Tan Wee Kiong 21-13 21-13 in the opening round.

The Indian combination of Satwik and Chirag will play the Chinese pair of Xie Hao Nan and Zeng Wei Han in the next round.

But Prannoy failed to clear the first hurdle, losing 19-21 18-21 to Meiraba in a match lasting 55 minutes.

Meiraba will take on Denmark's Mads Christophersen, who beat India's Kiran George 21-15 13-21 21-17.

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty PHOTO: PTI

In women's singles, Ashmita Chaliha came from behind to enter the second round with a hard-fought 19-21 21-15 21-14 win over Ester Nurumi Tri Wardoyo of Indonesia.

But a tough second-round encounter awaits Ashmita as she will be up against top seed Han Yue of China.

Yue got the better of another Indian in Malvika Bansod, registering a comfortable 21-11 21-10 win. —*PTI*

Arjun outplays Safarli in Sharjah Masters

SHARJAH, 15 MAY

World number seven Erigaise Arjun started his campaign on a positive note, outplaying Eltaj Safarli of Azerbaijan in the first round of the Sharjah Masters chess tournament here. Indian Grandmasters Aravindh Chithamabaram and P Iniyan also started on the winning side defeating compatriot Bharath Subramaniyam and Irani Pouya of Iran respectively in the USD 52000 prize money tournament considered one of the strongest open of the world.Besides the three Indian winners two young players having Indian origin Abhimanyu Mishra of the United States and lowest seed Shreyas Royal of England also recorded victories at the expense of Raja Ritvik and Rinat Jumabayev of Kazakhstan respectively.

It was generally a tough day for the higher-seeded players as they conceded a lot of draws. The strength of the tournament became clear on the opening day itself with just 18 decisive games out of a total of 44.

Erigaise Arjun and Eltaj Safarli PHOTO: PTI

Arjun though was relentless and capitalized on a strategic middle-game error from Safarli who suffered for the rest of the game. A Najdorf by the Azerbaijani as black was met with the Classical treatment and Arjun gained the upper hand when Safarli went for unwarranted complications giving Arjun a dangerous passed pawn in the middle game. —*PTI*

ROME MASTERS

Unheralded Tabilo reaches first Masters 1000 semi

ROME, 15 MAY

Chilean Alejandro Tabilo, the No 29 seed, continued his breakthrough run at the Rome Masters by beating Chinese Zhizhen Zhang 6-3, 6-4 to reach the semi-finals at the Foro Italico in Roma on Wednesday afternoon.

Tabilo, ranked No. 32, will face the winner of the match between German Alexander Zverev, the No. 3 seed, and American Taylor Fritz, the No. 11 seed, next. It's his first time in the semi-finals of a Masters 1000 event.

"It's incredible, I can't believe it! I'm really happy to be in the semi-finals. I'm playing the best tennis of my life. I was very tense at the end, but I tried to put myself in poker face mode so as not to show my emotions. And in the end, I served very well," explained Alejandro Tabilo after his victory.

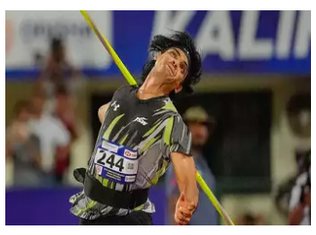
Alejandro Tabilo and Aryna Sabalenka PHOTO: AFP

The Chilean beat German Yannick Hanfmann (6-3, 7-6 (4)), Serb Novak Djokovic, the top seed (6-2, 6-3), and Russian Karen Khachanov, the No 16 seed (7-6 (5), 7-6 (10)) earlier in the tournament.

World number two **Aryna Sabalenka** cruised through to the semi-finals of the Italian Open with victory over ninth seed Jelena Ostapenko.

The Belarusian needed just one hour and 13 minutes to dispatch Latvian Ostapenko 6-2 6-4. Two-time Grand Slam champion Sabalenka will face compatriot Victoria Azarenka or American 13th seed Danielle Collins in the last four in Rome.

She could then face world number one Iga Swiatek in the final, a repeat of the Madrid Open final earlier this month which the Polish top seed won dramatically. —*AP*



Neeraj Chopra PHOTO: PTI

CHOPRA WINS GOLD ON INDIAN SOIL AFTER 3 YEARS

BHUBANESWAR, 15 MAY

Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra won the gold medal in the men's javelin throw event of the Federation Cup here, his spear shimmering through the balmy Wednesday evening sky after an unusually slow start in his first competitive outing on Indian soil in three years.

The 26-year-old superstar struggled to get going in the competition and he was second after three rounds. He took the lead in the fourth round with an effort of 82.27m and he did not take the final round as he was leading after DP Manu, who settled for silver, had finished his final round throw.

Chopra last took part in a domestic competition at the same event on March 17, 2021, when he won a gold with a throw of 87.80m.

Since then, Chopra has won a historic gold in the Tokyo Olympics, became Diamond League champion in 2022, world champion in 2023, and defended Asian Games gold in China.

He also won three individual legs of the Diamond League and claimed a silver in the 2022 World Championships. —*PTI*

Pakistan has a mental block when it comes to playing India in World Cup: Misbah

KARACHI, 15 MAY

Former Pakistan captain Misbah-ul-Haq believes his country will find it difficult to edge past India when the two sides clash in next month's T20 World Cup as there seems to be a "mental block" when it comes to playing the arch-rivals in ICC events.India and Pakistan will clash on 9 June in New York in arguably the most awaited league-stage match of the T20 World Cup that begins on June 1 in the Americas. India has lost to Pakistan just once (in 2021) in seven T20 World Cup matches. "You call it Pakistan's jinx or mental block when it comes to playing India in World Cups. Pakistan will need to do a lot because this is a very skilled Indian team with a powerful bowling line-up and two good spinners," Misbah said on 'Star Sports Press Room' on Wednesday. —*PTI*

Misbah-ul-Haq PHOTO: AFP

JOSHNA, ABHAY AND VELAVAN BAG GOLD IN NATIONAL DOUBLES SQUASH

CHENNAI, 15 MAY

Joshna Chinappa, Abhay Singh, and Velavan Senthilkumar shone brightly winning gold in their respective categories during the National Doubles Squash Championship, which was revived after 17 years, here on Wednesday.

Abhay, the National Games gold medallist and national championship silver medallist, started the day well winning men's doubles with Velavan, beating Rahul Baitha and Suraj Chand 2-0 (11-4, 11-8).

The 25-year-old added another gold to his kitty in the mixed doubles category soon. Abhay and Joshna Chinappa prevailed in a three-set thriller over the fancied Harinder Pal Singh Sandhu and Rathika Seelan 2-1 (10-11, 11-2, 11-9). —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Haaland puts Man City on brink of title

BHUBANESWAR, 14 MAY

Erling Haaland scored twice to settle Manchester City's nerves as the Premier League champions beat Tottenham 2-0 to take a giant step towards a historic fourth straight English title on Tuesday. The Norwegian forward tapped home a pinpoint Kevin De Bruyne cross early in the second half to score City's first-ever league goal at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. He netted a late penalty to seal the three points for the visitors, minutes after substitute goalkeeper Stefan Ortega saved brilliantly from Son Heung-min.

The win takes Pep Guardiola's team two points clear of Arsenal at the top of the table after 37 games.

Victory at the Etihad against West Ham on Sunday will make them champions for a fourth consecutive season, regardless of the Gunners' result against Everton.

No team in English top-flight history has ever won four titles in a row.

Erling Haaland scored twice. A win on Sunday will make Manchester City champions for a fourth consecutive season. PHOTO: AFP

Defeat for Spurs also guarantees that Aston Villa will finish in the fourth Champions League spot, joining City, Arsenal, and Liverpool in Europe's top-tier competition next season.

"We gave the chance in our hands for the last game," Guardiola told the BBC. "The tennis players say 'The serve to win Wimbledon, the last game, is the most difficult one'.

"It happened in our period against Aston Villa (in 2022). And many, many years ago it happened with Sergio Aguero (scoring) in 93 minutes 20 seconds against QPR. So there will be the typical game."

- Erling Haaland scored twice to settle Manchester City's nerves as the Premier League champions beat Tottenham 2-0 to take a giant step towards a historic fourth straight English title on Tuesday

Guardiola called for help from City's fans to get them over the line.

"We know what we're playing for," he said. "The tension is there, the rival is so good. It's why it is difficult, we know that. "Everyone come to the stadium and make noise. These games are more difficult but you have to do it. We'll have one day off, two days to prepare, and then we will do our best." —*AP*

Jude and Vinicius shine as champions Real smash Alaves

LONDON, 14 MAY

Jude Bellingham and Vinicius Junior inspired runaway Spanish champions Real Madrid to a 5-0 rout of Alaves on Tuesday. Carlo Ancelotti's side continued warming up for the Champions League final with a comprehensive demolition of their Basque visitors at the Santiago Bernabeu. Bellingham scored the opener and played a part in Madrid's next three goals, two scored by Vinicius, finding his best form at the business end of the season.

Turkish teenager Arda Guler added a late fifth to put the cherry on Madrid's cake and move them 17 points clear of second-place Barcelona.

"We've had just one defeat in the league and I think that a big part of the success is because of (the defense)," Ancelotti told reporters after his side's 30th consecutive league game unbeaten.

PHOTO: AFP

"I knew I'd come back strongly -- I'm the same Courtois, or even better," said the goalkeeper.

Ancelotti selected the vast majority of his first choice line-up after resting them at the weekend, and Madrid's usual suspect opened the scoring. It was Bellingham, with his 19th league goal and perhaps his luckiest. —*AP*